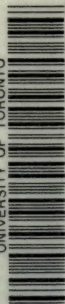


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CRITICISM AT A VENTURE



GERALDINE E. HODGSON

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Easter 1919

CRITICISM AT A VENTURE

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CRITICISM AT A VENTURE

BY
GERALDINE E. HODGSON

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TO
HELEN
AND
GERALD HAY
(BLACK WATCH)

PREFACE

THE writer has had only one object in making this book, to spread, if possible, appreciation, love of our literature. It is not meant to provide material for examination papers, nor for the overnight patching up of "lessons" for delivery next day in school. It is meant for the refreshment of teachers, if they will read it just as human beings.

As a rule, criticism emanates either from heights of academic wisdom or knowledge, or from fellow-members of a coterie, or school, or fellowship. This volume has no such origin. The writer knew practically none of the poets personally who are discussed here; one, a youth killed in France at the outset of a brilliant career, was a friend; of the rest none were more than acquaintance or chance correspondent, and scarcely any that.

Poetry has never become to her professional matter either as an examiner or tutor, so this volume does not pretend to rest on academic or learned authority. It was originally suggested by a question, sometime since asked, by an unknown correspondent, who had chanced to be a listener at a stray lecture to an annual gathering.

It is the chosen recreation of a lover of poetry, who possibly attaching too little value to conventional canons and authoritative criticism, has wandered at will without advice or direction; and has retrieved from those wanderings all which opportunity, thought and some "fostering star" have combined to contrive.

G. E. H.

Feast of S. Michael, 1918.

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Criticism at a Venture

I. The Legacy of Tennyson

THERE are people who scornfully pretend that a school of critics exists who are unaware of the work of any English poets later than Tennyson and Browning, and another whose members scoff at all the recent singers as "mere minor poets." Setting aside the unfruitful and discouraging reflexion that in the eyes of so many of our fellow-creatures whatever we do appears to be wrong, a kind of extension and eternising of the old jest, "Go and see what Tommy and Totty are doing and tell them they mustn't," we may maintain the more cheerful proposition that in the long tale of the development of English poetry, which surely is, whether we regard its long life, its amazing variety or its intrinsic beauty, second to none, in that long tale each of the poets in succession takes up the lyre, and we, listeners, do well to turn an entirely deaf ear to none of them. Beyond the above contemptuous pretence, there is, and it is even more damaging, an indefinite but widespread impression that Tennyson, at any rate, was immensely over-valued in the Victorian era. There are critics who call him *passé*, who hint, not obscurely, that his vogue is not only over, but rightly over. Doubtless such crude judgments condemn themselves, they are not the dicta of well-informed or discriminatingly delicate criticism; but the regrettable fact is not thereby removed, that it is hardly for the well-being of the nation, of that inchoate, heterogeneous mass called "the Public," that work of such individualised and intrinsic perfection as Tennyson's best, should be thus ineptly appraised.

Before an attempt is made here to reverse such strictures, another question presses. Did the two great Victorian poets

really represent "Victorianism" so truly as they revealed themselves? Did not the *Lines to Virgil* let the real Tennyson escape more freely than the religious and philosophical yearnings of *In Memoriam* could, however congenial and apt the latter might prove to a large mass of his contemporaries?

Tennyson the craftsman, the subtly skilled artificer, who played on words as if they were a violin, who revelled in line and colour like an artist—

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott—

surely the seer, the musician and the artist gave us his most utterly individual self in the golden *Lines to Virgil*. Again, it is at least possible that he himself esteemed the spontaneous natural joy of *Early Spring* above the laboured if beautiful pictures, scattered like elaborately polished gems through the *Idylls of the King*: pictures which in their minute detail belonged to the contemporary style of landscape painting, but had little affinity with

Opens a door in Heaven;
From skies of glass
A Jacob's ladder falls
On greening grass,
And o'er the mountain walls
Young angels pass.

Before them fleets the shower,
And burst the buds,
And shine the level lands
And flash the floods;
The stars are from their hands
Flung thro' the woods.

Only Nature herself, in her most rapturous instant of resurrection, the instant of the diaphanous wind-flowers—

stars
Flung thro' the woods—

can excel such joy, wholly devoid as it is of that sadness inherent in spring,

the peaceful poignancy,
The joy contrite,
Sadder than sorrow, sweeter than delight,

of which, alone among English Poets, Coventry Patmore sang.

It is, no doubt, idle for any one to deny that as Tennyson was the favourite, so he was, in many respects, the most truly interpretative poet of the Nineteenth Century: but that admission does not shut out the possibility that the popular side of his work was, as it was the least really original, so also the least self-interpreting, and therefore not the greatest, the most notable, nor the most enduringly valuable part of his whole achievement.

What then is it which will live, of Tennyson's work? If we are still too close to him to decide that question, surely those of us who love his best work well, can agree that at any rate, the Plays will not hold anything like the premier place. Again, probably, as men come to realise more and more the intrinsic artificiality of the *Idylls*, which, in spite of many passages long endeared to us, from which we would not willingly part, have avoided the glamour of chivalry, and have, while achieving a mild *succès de scandale* among Protestants, caught no touch of Catholicism, then, that Cycle of Poems, in spite of the music of the verse, and the vividness of the pictures, will tend to fade into the background. The real Tennyson of England's love, will live in the shorter Poems.

As there will always be people who insist on instituting comparisons, however irritating, unenlightening and generally fruitless, there will most likely, to the end of time, be discussions over the relative merits of the *Ballad of the Revenge* and *Hervé Riel*. What matters to people who can discern true metal from false is that we possess them both; and that while England is herself, and keeps peace-at-any-price mortals at bay, these two ballads, lineal descendants of the spirit which sang the *Song of Brunanburgh* and the *Fight at Maldon*, will continue to enrich our heritage.

Among the longer of Tennyson's shorter poems, it is inconceivable that those which brought him, about the forties and fifties of last century, the almost adoring love of a smaller circle than most people now care to remember it to have been, poems such as *Ænone*, the *Lotus-Eaters* and *A Dream of Fair Women*, can ever drop out of the collection

which is treasured by real, genuine lovers of Poetry. Lovers of Poetry !—not people who regard it solely, or even mainly, as stuff for lectures, material for books of criticism, or exercises for examination purposes ; but who love it for its own sake, who find in it a finelier-edged joy in happy hours, and an unquenchable source of refection and consolation in days of grief, tedium or bitter loss.

It is not easy now to realise what effect *Ænone*, for example, must have had when it appeared. Was it of that perhaps that Henry Sidgwick was thinking when he wrote of the “compressed, *inhaltsvoll*, classic style of Tennyson” ?¹ It appeared first in 1833. Even those who had still fresh in their minds the majesty of Keats’ *Hyperion*, or of Shelley’s choruses in *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound*, must have realised the advent of another great poet, even though one differing markedly from these his predecessors. With Keats, one looks at pictures ; as when *Hyperion* “flared” through his halls :—

From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
Through bowers of lustrous and enwreathéd light,
With diamond-pavéd, lustrous, long arcades.

With Shelley, we hear the music of the spheres :—

With mighty whirl the multitudinous orb
Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety like light ;
And the wild odour of the forest flowers,
The music of the living grass and air,
The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
Round its intense, yet self-conflicting speed
Seem kneaded into one aerial mass
Which drowns the sense. Within the orb itself,
Pillowed upon its alabaster arms,
Like to a child o’er-wearied with sweet toil
On its own folded wings and wavy hair
The Spirit of the Earth is laid asleep.

But when Tennyson is at his best, we neither see nor hear consciously, we are “there,” merged in the actual happening. Such lines as :—

For now the noonday quiet holds the hill :
The grass-hopper is silent in the grass :
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, and the cicada sleeps.
The purple flowers droop ; the golden bee
Is lily-cradled—

¹ *Henry Sidgwick : A Memoir*, p. 108.

are not a picture nor description merely, even if they be, as Professor Churton Collins urges, a mingled recollection (and once even a partial translation) of other poets, Homer, Callimachus and Theocritus. They are rather an environment in which we wander as in actual country ; and in which—this is the point—we lose all conscious sense of ourselves as percipients. Mr. Churton Collins seemed, in this criticism, strangely to miss this fact. He contends that the lines—

The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow,

are a recollection from the Idyll vii., 22 of Theocritus, which he thus renders in English :—

When indeed the very lizard is sleeping on the loose stones of the wall.

Though he compares an original line from Tennyson with his own translation from the Greek, yet Tennyson's line may surely be claimed as an intensely characteristic instance of his power of plunging the reader so effectually into a scene, that everything, including poet and his lines, are forgotten in the overwhelming reality. For indeed, it is very difficult to trace, still more so to prove, the alleged loan. Not only Theocritus and Tennyson, but most of us ordinary folk, have often enough seen lizards basking on sun-warmed walls ; and walls, in many parts of the world, are commonly made of stones. The only important words used by both poets are *lizard* and *stone*, without which no one could express this particular thought about this very every-day occurrence. Tennyson mentions no *wall*. When we come to analyse what is presented, is it too much to say that here Theocritus, thus rendered into English, describes in a sufficiently commonplace way a quite commonplace fact, while Tennyson puts us back into the very condition in which we have been before, and we stand again face to face with the strange unearthly suspense of life in the creature which has stopped our hasty feet, and made us hold our breath, lest it hear us and vanish. As we read the lines, the old effect is produced ; it is no description but a happening in which we are ourselves involved :—

The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, and the cicla sleeps.

Or again when Tennyson writes—

I waited underneath the dawning hills,
Aloft the mountain lawn was dewy-dark,
And dewy-dark aloft the mountain pine :
Beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris,
Leading a jet-black goat, white-horn'd, white-hooved,
Came up from reedy Simois all alone—

it is not a new fact which he presents so much as a sudden recalling of something buried in the mists of memory : a recognition so swift, so instantaneous, that we no longer know that there was a time when we were unaware of it. All our lives long, so now it seems, we have known this beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris, with that strange daemonic animal, Paris who

Came up from reedy Simois all alone.

It is noteworthy that this most exquisite passage stood in the 1833 Edition of Tennyson's *Poems*, just as it did in the much-amended Edition of 1842, save, in the latter, for the addition of the line

I waited underneath the dawning hills.

It is otherwise with the panoramic, and perhaps not sufficiently valued, *Dream of Fair Women*. Of this, Professor Churton Collins wrote : " In nearly every edition between 1833 and 1853, it was revised and perhaps no poem proves more strikingly the scrupulous care which Tennyson took to improve what he thought susceptible of improvement."¹

If any one ever followed Boileau's advice—

Hâtez-vous lentement, et sans perdre courage
Vingt fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage ;
Polissez-le sans cesse, et le repolissez
Ajoutez quelque fois, et souvent effacez,²

Tennyson did. If we would see how even such skilled work benefited by this perpetual filing, we may compare the first and last drafts of *A Dream of Fair Women*. Let us take a stanza which, as originally written, has in it something approaching to a touch of vulgarity—

¹ *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, by Churton Collins. p. 115.

² *L'Art Poétique*, Chant 1^{er}, ll. 171-4.

What nights we had in Egypt ! I could hit
 His humours while I crossed them : O the life
 I led him, and the dalliance and the wit,
 The flattery and the strife.

Dramatic insight into character was not perhaps one of Tennyson's most striking gifts, any more than a quick understanding of women's nature : but a flash of the unusual illumination which lighted his way with Cleopatra, as, in a rare instant of apprehension, he wrote—

Nay, yet it chafes me that I could not bend
 One will, nor tame and tutor with mine eye
 That dull, cold-blooded Cæsar,

must have made him rewrite this particular verse, leaving it incomparably different :—

We drank the Libyan sun to sleep, and lit
 Lamps which outburned Canopus. O my life
 In Egypt ! O the dalliance and the wit,
 The flattery and the strife.

It is a platitude of criticism that Nature has played a great part in English Poetry. But it is not by any means always the same or even a similar part ; and Tennyson's handling of it differed markedly from that of his immediate predecessors. Wordsworth, as the merest tyro knows, treated natural phenomena sacramentally : to him, as the metaphysician would say, the phenomenon was always less than the noumenon ; or, in other words, he pierced through the beauty of which his senses made him aware, to that spiritual presence which he discerned behind the visible and tangible. Shelley

all colour and all odour and all bloom

cast an etherealised unearthly glamour over the face of material things, dissolving their reality, their tangibility into an alluring dream of inexpressible light, fire and strangely impalpable force.

Professor Palgrave¹ claims that " Tennyson's general rendering of Nature might be defined as nearer the manner of Keats than any other at least of our recent poets."

And yet, surely, exquisite as Keats' pictures are, they are

¹ *Landscape in Poetry*, Francis T. Palgrave, p. 285.

pictures. They have about them always something spectacular, which just tinges their actual vitality with the effort of description, making us think of Keats as a visitor to rather than a denizen of the country. Perhaps, after all, Byron's gibe at "the cockney school" was not wholly wanting in perspicacity. Doubtless Hampstead, in the early years of the nineteenth century, was rural instead of opulently suburban as we know it. Undoubtedly Keats knew country places and indulged in walking tours, but, for all that, he was not a "countryman." Tennyson was. Moreover, there is a literary element in Keats' perception of Nature, a loan from the classics, a manner quite foreign to Tennyson's. Where Keats was an enchanted visitor—Tennyson wandered as the home-born, the native: and the resulting difference of mood can be neither overlooked nor explained away.

Professor Churton Collins suggests that the 1842 Edition of Tennyson's *Poems* together with *In Memoriam* "represent the crown and flower of his achievement; what is best in them, he never excelled, and perhaps never equalled." Then he asks this question, "Would we exchange half a dozen of the best of these poems, or a score of the best sections of *In Memoriam* for all that he produced between 1850 and his death?"¹ If we are going to set about answering this question, we may do well to remember first of all that *The Voyage* did not appear in the 1842 volume, but was included in *Enoch Arden and Other Poems* (whose original title was *Idylls of the Hearth*), and was published in 1864; a poem of which no less penetrating a critic than Dr. Sidgwick wrote: "How he has caught the spirit of the age in *The Voyage* . . . how wonderful—to me—is the lyricised thought of verse 9."² When we remember that this verse speaks of the

one fair Vision (which) ever fled
Down the waste waters day and night—

and enshrines the picture—

And now we lost her, now she gleam'd
Like Fancy made of golden air,

¹ *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, edited by John Churton Collins, p. xx.

² *Henry Sidgwick: a Memoir*, p. 119.

Now nearer to the prow she seem'd,
Like Virtue firm, like Knowledge fair,
Now high on waves that idly burst
Like Heavenly Hope she crown'd the sea,
And now, the bloodless point reversed,
She bore the blade of Liberty,

then, any one who knew Dr. Sidgwick will also know what Frederic Myers meant when he wrote : " My most vivid memory of my friend is as he would recite to me—and I have never known man or woman who could recite poetry like him—that noble apologue of seekers, which was the central expression of his inward life. I speak of Tennyson's poem of *The Voyage*."¹ Indeed, if anyone will read the poem afresh, he will surely admit that it is unique in English Poetry ; that, if it caught, as doubtless it did, the spirit of some of the academic seekers and their kin in the Mid-Victorian Age, yet it is really instinct with the spirit of every soul, in every age, who seeks the flying goal of absolute attainment : a goal dear no doubt, as the great Philosopher said, to many of his co-temporaries, and which was, in a peculiar and exalted sense, his own supreme and life-long aim.

Then again, *Lucretius* belongs to a considerably later time than the 1842 volume, for it appeared first in *Macmillan's Magazine* for May, 1868 ; and, two years after, was printed at the end of the volume which was issued with the title *The Holy Grail*. Certainly, few lovers of Tennyson would part with it, willingly. Finally, late in life, he gave the world those matchless lines *To Virgil*, published first in the *Nineteenth Century* of September, 1882, and afterwards in 1885, included in *Tiresias and Other Poems*. It is no exaggeration to call them matchless, since Mr. Myers, writing to Hallam Tennyson, said, " Surely that Ode, read with due lightening of certain trochaic accents in the latter half of each line, touches the high-water mark of English song ; "² and Frederic Myers was pre-eminently a critic. If any one will dispute the verdict, then for what poem of which English Poet will he displace these incomparably melodious verses with their wealth of imagery ? From another point of view, these *Lines*

¹ *In Memory of Henry Sidgwick*, by Frederic Myers (Proceedings of the S.P.R., Vol. xv, p. 452).

² *Life of Lord Tennyson*, by Hallam Tennyson, Vol. ii, p. 483.

deserve appreciation; viz. because *par excellence* they display Tennyson's characteristic gifts, his sense of sound, form and colour, his precise and imaginative observation, his delicate apprehension of beauty in and for itself.

Is it not, after all, as a consummate craftsman that Tennyson will live in English Literature, his most perfect work being found in the shorter rather than in the longer Poems? Had he been able to rid himself entirely of all trace of undue consciousness about a "message" he would have been a typical English "Parnassian." As it is, Professor Churton Collins notes that he would sometimes quote the saying of Georges Sand: "*L'art pour l'art est un vain mot: l'art pour le vrai, l'art pour le beau et le bon, voilà la religion que je cherche.*"¹

L'art pour le beau, there, at any rate, is a near approach to the Parnassian Ideal; but mixed up with two other "ends" which can, by maladroit handling, become responsible for the excesses of the "message" theory. The Parnassian Ideal was, as we all know, *la passion du beau*: beauty was the test, not, in the Puritan sense, truth nor good, but beauty sheer and unalloyed. Because, whether it be a popular belief or no, and in the teeth of Keats' couplet, there is truth—at any rate if the word cover that which actually *is*—which is not beautiful: for instance, the abominations of slum-life, or the inanities of Life's inveterate idlers. These are only too true in the sense of being intensely real, but I suppose no one thinks them beautiful. Again, things and people too may be good, at any rate in a limited sense, and be markedly unbeautiful. On the other hand there are people, events, conditions and things which some claim as beautiful, even though they may be manifestly evil, obviously unclean. There is, in a Clique, an inclination to that pose which declares that no matter how *bad* a thing is, if it be beautiful, it is justifiable: while a few go one mad step further and seem to claim that beauty is only sublime when it garbs itself in the unclean, the vicious or even the coarse. It is evident that such people have wrested ideas from their lawful contents, and words from their legitimate meaning. It is equally certain that they will never find a common ground of agreement with the healthier-minded

¹ *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, p. xxxix.

portion of the population. My object so far has been to suggest that there is no necessity inherent in things, that if one of the terms good, true, beautiful, be applicable to any phenomenon, the other two must be. But neither is there any reason why they should not be sometimes. Therefore, anything beautiful and good, or beautiful and true, or all three together, comes within the Parnassian range; all which is beautiful and nothing which is not belonging to that kingdom which *Les Parnassiens* quietly and indefeasibly annexed as their own.

Though not an undiluted Parnassian, Tennyson with his keen eye for beauty whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual may be compared, not unfairly, with de Heredia. True, the latter's choice of the sonnet form demanded a more chiselled art than Tennyson's lyrical and narrative work; but *Les Trophées* itself—de Heredia's immortal volume—is not fuller of exquisite pictures most felicitously captured than would be an Anthology of Tennyson's shorter poems, which should represent the very summit of his achievement. Yet always Tennyson's art is more fluid than de Heredia's: one can call to mind nothing which one would put with the sextet of *La Trebbia*—

Rougeissant le ciel noir de flamboiements lugubres,
A l'horizon, brûlaient les villages Insubres;
On entendit au loin barrir un éléphant.

Et là-bas, sous le pont, adossé contre une arche,
Hannibal écoutait, pensif et triomphant,
Le piétinement sourd des légions en marche.

Here, against the background as of a great painter, de Heredia has planted statuesquely, immovably, the listening Hannibal, like some martial figure wrought in bronze by the sculptor's art.

In the handling of Nature, as has been already pointed out, Tennyson's unique gift lay in his skill in plunging us straight into a "happening," so that we are part of it, not merely percipients of a fine description. Stress must be laid on his peculiarly objective method; instances have been given above: the point can be pressed home best by comparison with other poets. For example, there is in *Sordello* a descrip-

tion which probably no one, who has once read it, would ever forget :—

That autumn eve was stilled :
A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back on its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,
The woods beneath lay black.

But the physical phenomenon, as the reader continues, becomes with its fierce colour contrasts the fit setting behind the restless crowd,—

not a face
But wrath made livid—

in Verona's market-place.

Then, if we turn to our poet, lately lost, the poet of the new century who perhaps excelled all his fellows in descriptive power, we may take such a picture as this :—

A ship, an isle, a sickle moon—

An isle beside an isle she lay,
The pale ships anchored in the bay,
While in the young moon's port of gold
A star-ship—as the mirrors told—
Put forth its great and lonely light
To the unreflecting Ocean, Night.
And still, a ship upon her seas,
The isle and the island cypresses
Went sailing on without the gale ;
And still there moved the moon so pale,
A crescent ship without a sail !¹

There is a scene of beauty, without one human creature ; but it is shot all through with human feeling, human longing and desire. If we turn to contemporary French poets, this element is still stronger. Verlaine, e.g. describes vividly, tellingly ; but not, as is Tennyson's fashion, everything which was there and nothing which was not. Take two stanzas of that poem we all know :—

Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleut dans la ville :
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon cœur ?

O bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits !
Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie
O le chant de la pluie !²

¹ *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*, James Elroy Flecker p. 37.

² *Choix de Poésies*, Paul Verlaine, p. 117.

True, we hear in the monotonous cadence of the words, the wearisome dripping of rain in town twilight, than which few sounds are more dreary. But it is all mixed up with human emotion. Verlaine seldom gives us the thing seen without reminding us of the mood of the seer, and of ourselves criticising or sympathising. Similarly Dowson writes—

A song of the setting sun !
The sky in the west is red,
And the sky is all but done :
While yonder up over head,
All too soon
There rises, so cold, the cynic moon,¹

only he does it with a single word, where Verlaine needs a phrase. It may perhaps elucidate the point further to consider Verhaeren, who occupies a middle place between the intense, objective, reproductive imagination of Tennyson, and the mingling of natural scene with human moods, so characteristic of Verlaine and Dowson, and of Tennyson's contemporary, Coventry Patmore. *La Neige* shall serve as an example, *La Pluie*, an even better one, is better known :—

La neige tombe indiscontinûment,
Comme une lente et longue et pauvre laine,
Parmi la morne et longue et pauvre plaine,
Froide d'amour, chaude de haine.

La neige tombe, infiniment,
Comme un moment—
Monotone—dans un moment ;
La neige choit, la neige tombe,
Monotone, sur les maisons.
Et les grenges et leurs cloisons,
La neige tombe et tombe
Myriadaire, au cimetière, au creux des tombes.

Le gel descend, au fond des os,
Et la misère, au fond des clos,
La neige et la misère, au fond des âmes.

Verhaeren's description here is as intensely vivid, as observing as Tennyson's : but the human interest breaks in just twice. Insistence on the characteristic reproducing reality of Tennysonian method is no argument that his way is the best, only a reminder of its peculiar individuality and distinctiveness. After all variety is the salt of life—the salt

¹ *Moritura*, Ernest Dowson.

only, not the substance. Still, it must not be forgotten that the well-known *Mariana in the South* proves Tennyson's ability, when he chose to use it, to draw an environment absolutely mirror-wise to a human mood. This poem will seem more remarkable if it be compared with the *Lady of Shalott*, the same central theme—utter loneliness—being surrounded by wholly diverse settings. The latter is one of those purely English scenes, of rich but daily beauty which were so essentially "home" to Tennyson that no sense of effort, no labouring after effect hampers him, or disturbs the reader : the spontaneousness of high June is there.

As *Mariana* was composed in Southern France, so it is tinged with the qualities which are particularly French ; lucidity, sharp outline, thin clear atmosphere, atmosphere penetrated by intellect, and that sympathy between the human mood and natural setting, more French than English, because it includes the environment of the man-made town as well as of the divinely-made "country." *Mariana* is perhaps the least "English" of Tennyson's poems. It has the relentlessness of a photograph taken by an operator whose sense of unity between sitter and scene passes beyond the actually visible room to a sympathetic world beyond ; it has the indelible vividness, so irreparably French of *la chose vue* ; it leaves on the heart a sense of irremediable anguish like Henri de Regnier's *Frisson du Soir*.

Yet no one among our own poets has equalled Tennyson in his own particular gift, his blending of accurate observation, intense appreciation of Nature, and perfect imagination, in the primitive sense of the word ; still less has any excelled him. Shelley almost adored natural beauty, but he lacked the alert eye for tiny details which seemed never to escape Tennyson's vigilance, such vital details. Take that flawless quatrain from *In Memoriam*,

When rosy plumelets tuft the larch,
And rarely pipes the mounted thrush ;
Or underneath the barren bush
Flits by the sea-blue bird of March.

Many of Earth's children had loved the coming of Spring before Tennyson was born ; yet for those who came with or

after him, he had added something, the literary beauty to the inherent loveliness of a physical process ; just as Walter Pater, in his description of Monna Lisa, added the Writer's quota to the Painter's achievement. As we pass through the Forest, and search the brown knotted sprays of the larch plantation, the young cones are, in themselves, no different from those which came forth in earlier springs. But they are more beautiful for us, because in our ears rings the music, and before our mind's eye glint the colours of those delicate lines. This inerrancy of natural description was a life-long gift : we may find it in such an early poem as *The Dying Swan*—

And far thro' the marish green and still
The tangled water-courses slept
Shot over with purple and green and yellow.

The real countryman may well stand amazed as he reflects on the wealth and precision of natural description here : Tennyson has drawn indelibly, in three lines, that which many would have blurred and muddled in three score.

This gift of swift and perfect delineation remained with him to the end of his life, as the lines about his Blackdown home may show—

You came and looked and loved the view
Long known and loved by me,
Green Sussex fading into blue
With one grey glimpse of sea.

To the Sussex-born that is incomparably done.

With all his accuracy and appreciativeness, Tennyson saw into the vital heart of the phenomenon—the picture, the event, or whatever it was which “appeared.” As a rule, just that capacity is more French than English. Henri de Regnier may be taken as a felicitous example : for instance,

Voici la nuit qui vient et ses folles paniques
Le vent ne souffle plus, le ramier s'est enfui,
Le jet d'eau se lamente en des plaintes rythmiques,

Et tes yeux grands ouverts me suivent dans la nuit.

Or more unforgettable still—

Car j'évoque les soirs de funestes départs
Où dans la chambre obscure et veuve de l'absente
On rassemble, en pleurant dans l'ombre grandissante
Le trésor douloureux des souvenirs épars.

Nor was it only in the case of physical beauty that Tennyson could thus catch and swiftly imprison it—

As these white robes are soil'd and dark
 To yonder shining ground ;
 As this pale taper's earthly spark
 To yonder argent round ;
 So shows my soul before the Lamb
 My spirit before Thee ;
 So in mine earthly house I am
 To that I hope to be,

a marvellous glimpse from a short poem which is a succession of the vividest spiritual suggestions.

Naturally, it is to *Lucretius* that the critic would turn for one of Tennyson's faultless pictures of intellectual beauty—

O Thou
 Passionless bride, divine Tranquillity
 Yearn'd after by the wisest of the wise,
 Who fail to find thee, being as thou art
 Without one pleasure and without one pain.

To this sensitively quick and intense love of beauty, Tennyson added not only a rare capacity for melodious language, but the more uncommon gift of perfectly apt diction. As a craftsman, pure and simple, he is remarkable among English poets. Nor was this gift superfluous in the generations through which he lived and which have followed him. Whether it be due to a materialistic spirit consequent on the amassing of great wealth, or connected with the monotonous effect of a superabundance of machine-produced goods, the old love of beautiful, dexterous, exactly apt and complete workmanship has suffered something of an eclipse among us. Not only, in spite of Tennyson's work and ideal in its midst, did the Victorian Age tolerate and apparently even delight in the most abominable and *banal* ugliness in every department of its existence, but it slipped gradually, and bit by bit and little by little into that decline of achievement whose brazen motto is "that will do."

Nor is his craftsmanship that which issues from a pure sense of duty, from the impulse to do a thing as well as may be because it is right so to do it, nor is it a matter of artistic technique. There was an individuality about it, issuing from his multi-sidedness. It was not remarkable merely because

as a matter of scholarship he knew and used, and, as a personal taste, revelled in every artifice of literary composition and rhetoric, but also because his senses were acute and alert in response to the undying attractions of colour and form and sound : and thus his art is a triumph—at its best—of matter and form subtly, perfectly blent.

If future ages endorse the judgment of a few in his own, the few whose feeling Frederic Myers expressed when he declared that the *Lines to Virgil* "touch the high-water mark of English Song," they will perhaps rank Tennyson actually with Virgil when the music of the verse—

Landscape-lover, lord of language
more than he that sang the Works and Days,
All the chosen coin of fancy
flashing out from many a golden phrase,

rings in their ears.

Nowadays, it is so usual to couple Tennyson and Browning together, that possibly only those of us who are old enough to have lived through the later Victorian days, will readily realise how distinctly they were differentiated during their lifetime. And rightly differentiated, for it is not as a consummate craftsman from the point of view of form that Browning will live. That may be conceded without, in any way, denying the beautiful melody and harmony which he could produce ; and without admitting the full charge of abrupt roughness sometimes over-urged against him. It is indeed idle to pretend that the poet who wrote

They give thy letter to me, even now
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift ; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee :
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves, (like the chequer work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves)
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine,

was deficient in the senses of colour and sound, or lacked craftsmanship to convey them in lines of haunting beauty.

Precisely why he who poured forth that torrent of emotion in a sweeping strain of glorious music, feeling which is enshrined for ever in the apostrophe

O Lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire

should have cared also to write

A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester ;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again
While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,

it is not perhaps easy to discover, unless one find the reason in that capacity for deliberate, pure provocation of which Browning was certainly not devoid. Occasionally, he annoyed people if he wished, and cheerfully paid the price. When in *The Ring and the Book*, he apostrophises his fellows—

Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you)—

the trace of subtle satisfaction is more apparent than is any real desire or hope in that other address at the end—

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen !)

Doubtless the lines which I have quoted from *Christmas Day*, are an excellent instance of the literary device—applied here not to single words but to sentences—known as onomatopœia : but there are happier examples in the Poets, because there are pleasanter sounds in creation than the mechanical labouring of a railway train.

Surely, as Tennyson's pre-eminent legacy was consummate workmanship, so Browning's is dramatic mastery of human character, only surpassed, if it be surpassed, by Shakspeare's. It is quite true that Browning excels in many other ways, but it is his sheer humanity which marks him out from the rest. Truly might he have echoed Terence's line

homo sum : nihil humani a me alienum puto.

What a legacy it is, since our crowning, disabling weakness is our small and clumsy appreciation of our fellows. It is not

wholly our own fault. The average man or woman lives in a very small circle : and within that enclosure, so bound are we by custom and convention that we tend to lose even that tiny fraction of difference from our neighbours, in which, so William James once declared, the interest of life lies. It is quite true that we can, if we will, enlarge our circle by the study of history ; while biographies, letters, memoirs and diaries may help. But not every one who tries to write these succeeds, and not all who read either understand or appreciate. It is then a priceless advantage to be able to study human nature in the light of a great poet's vision, when that poet was an incomparable seer into the human heart. This legacy of knowledge of the fundamental elements of human nature Browning left to his countrymen with a royal munificence. But as a craftsman, Tennyson will for ever surpass him. It is probable that the Victorian Age in which he lived appreciated the melody of his verse above its picturesqueness. Ruskin's work of suggestion that pictures and architecture are a vital integral part of human wealth was still in the making : but the English, if they have lost something of the musical craftsmanship whose fruits were so largely destroyed in the pillaging of the Monasteries, have ever been of those

who carry music in their heart.

There have been critics who have accused our English tongue of lacking flexibility and melody ; but perhaps, after all, the language is less stolid than ourselves. Those strange people who can see nothing beautiful in any machinery of any kind may gasp if they learn that some of us, watching an airplane climbing into the heights of the heavens, there and then without any conscious effort on our part, hear ringing in our ears the echo of Shelley's spiral song of ascent—

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun
O'er which clouds are bright'ning
Thou dost float and run
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

Nor is that a solitary instance of the perfection of sounds which are possible in our speech : for instance, does the world

contain lines more rarely imitative, more daringly resonant than Dobell's about the nightingale :—

and still he sang
And all his staunchless song
As something falling unaware,
Fell out of the tall trees he sang among,
Fell ringing down the ringing morn, and rang,
Rang like a golden jewel down a golden stair.

Moreover, if we ask for them, we can have in our own English tongue the most delicate, fairy-flutelike sounds, such as Frederic Myers could utter—

Trill as of coming birds
Heard unaware—
Poise as of humming-birds
Hanging in air !

Starriest, youthfulest
Flower of a face
Who shall the truthfulest
Tell thee thy grace ?

In spite of these instances and many others which could be cited from the poets, yet it may be justifiably put down to Tennyson's credit account that it was his habitual use of his mother-tongue which proved so conclusively to his fellow-men the intrinsic and abundant fitness of English for melodious expression. Surely, when in 1832 men turned from the dreary political strife raging round the problems of Parliamentary Reform to the music of the volume which Tennyson published in that year, the volume which contained among others *Ænone*, then they must almost have imagined that it was all a mistake, and that the Italian waters had never closed over Shelley's head, quenching his gift of song.

We may omit Browning's *Pauline*, despite the beautiful passages scattered through it, because, as every student of literature knows, it passed unheeded except by men of insight, here and there, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti (who are always few and rare) : and, having excepted that, there is something almost ludicrous in the recollection that the contemporaries of *Ænone* and the *Lotus-Eaters* were the works of Felicia Hemans and Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn-Law Rhymes*. What a relief it must have been to turn from them to *Ænone*,

say to that passage about the grasshopper already quoted, or again to—

Naked they came to that smooth-swarded bower,
And at their feet the crocus brake like fire
Violet, amaracus and asphodel,
Lotos and lilies, and a wind arose ;

or once more—

But when I look'd, Paris had raised his arm,
And I beheld great Heré's angry eyes,
As she withdrew into the golden cloud,
And I was left alone within the bower.
And from that time to this, I am alone,
And I shall be alone until I die.

In a totally different harmony of sounds, Tennyson had proved his rare mastery, in the same slim volume—

How may full-sail'd verse express,
How may measured words adore
The full flowing harmony
Of thy swan-like stateliness,
Eleānore ?
The luxuriant symmetry
Of thy floating gracefulness,
Eleānore,
Every turn and glance of thine,
Every lineament divine,
Eleānore.

We turn the pages and there, surpassing them both, we find the matchless cradling melody of the *Lotus-Eaters*—

VII

But propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)
With half dropt eyelids still,
Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
His waters from the purple hill—

Only to hear and see the far-off, sparkling brine,
Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

VIII

The Lotus blooms beneath the barren peak :
The Lotus blows by every winding creek :
All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone :
Round and round the spicy downs, the yellow Lotus-dust is
blown.

If any one will contend that during his lifetime Tennyson was over-belauded, it can hardly be denied that lately his work

has been unduly depreciated, and his example unwisely disregarded by the crowd of youthful poets, whose half-polished work has, during the last decade, poured from the press. With the exception of Elroy Flecker, which of the pre-War "Georgians" seems to care pre-eminently for beauty? Flecker did. The *Times* in its obituary notice on January 6, 1915, wrote truly: "By his death there passes away a poet whose accomplished work was equalled by few of his coevals, his promise by still fewer." It is not easy to illustrate, or rather to convey his sense of Beauty by a single extract, but perhaps this may serve in some measure, a poem from the volume "written," as he said in the Preface, "with the single intention of creating beauty":—

Had I that haze of streaming blue,
That sea below the summer faced,
I'd work and weave a dress for you
And kneel to clasp it round your waist,
And broider with those burning bright
Threads of the sun across the sea,
And bind it with the silver light
That wavers in the olive tree.

Had I the gold that like a river
Pours through our garden, eve by eve,
Our garden that goes on for ever
Out of the world, as we believe;
Had I that glory on the vine
That splendour soft on tower and town,
I'd forge a crown of that sunshine
And break before your feet the crown.

Through the great pinewood I have been
An hour before the lustre dies,
Nor have such forest colours seen
As those that glimmer in your eyes,
Ah, misty woodland, down whose deep
And twilight paths I love to stroll,
The meadows quieter than sleep
And pools more secret than the soul!

Could I but steal that awful throne
Ablaze with dreams and songs and stars,
Where sits Night a man of stone
On the frozen mountain spars.
I'd cast him down for he is old,
And set my Lady there to rule,
Gowned with silver, crowned with gold,
And in her eyes the forest pool.

Not long before his death, writing to me from Switzerland, Flecker said: "It is Paul Fort who can show us what it is to

be a poet : it simply means an enthusiasm for the world in every detail." That reminds us of genius being an infinite capacity for taking pains. I think Tennyson, with his minute apprehension of reality would have claimed a kinsman in this son of Gloucestershire, who knew that the core of poetry is "an enthusiasm" (*enthusiasm*—originally possession by the god) "for the world in every detail."

We must not forget that by his beautiful poem on Rupert Brooke, published in the *Fortnightly Review* (for February, 1916), Wilfrid Wilson Gibson has proved that he also can *sustain* exquisite thought, exquisitely expressed. Hitherto, such verse had been exceptional in poems conceived in the more aggressively Georgian manner.

If any portion of Tennyson's work, once over-extolled, have suffered an astonishing eclipse, it is the *Idylls*. Because they are artificial and faulty in a score of places, and because they were extravagantly admired, we cannot therefore justify the contempt with which they are often treated now. It is folly to deny the melody of the verse, the vividness of description, or the wonderful perfection of language. The following lines may be hackneyed, but that fact cannot impair their consummate excellence—

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery.

For the long space of nearly sixty years, Tennyson continued to pour forth a flood of song : the grave penetrating rhythm of *Lucretius* ; the easy if sometimes almost mechanical lilt of the *Idylls*, the sob-choked melody of *In Memoriam*. Then, in later years, came the sonorous, rather melodramatic resonance which was perhaps a development of a possibility

always latent within him, but which he had suppressed until Swinburne's example overbore his previous restraint. Thus, in the eighties, he gave the world such riotous lines as—

When he clothed a naked mind with the wisdom and wealth of his own,
And I bow'd myself down as a slave to his intellectual throne,
When he coin'd into English gold some treasure of classical song,
Bright as with deathless hope—but, however they sparkled and shone,
When he rose as it were on the wings of an eagle beyond me, and past
Over the range and the change of the world from the first to the last;

or worse still—

And the suns of the limitless Universe sparkled and shone in the sky,
Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew that their light was a lie—
Bright as with deathless hope—but, however they sparkled and shone
The dark little worlds running round them were worlds of woe like
our own—

No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth below,
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe.

Yet the same volume, *Tiresias*, contained the poem which Myers declared touched "the high-water mark of English song," and which, whether that verdict be true or not, was incontestably and far and away the most musical which Tennyson ever wrote, the *Lines to Virgil*. Probably, among its verses the palm must be given—from the point of view of glorious rhythm—to the eighth or the last. In volume of majestic sound the eighth may be thought the more excellent—

Now thy Forum roars no longer,
fallen every purple Cæsar's dome—
Tho' thine ocean-roll of rhythm
sound for ever of Imperial Rome :

but it is doubtful if anything could surpass the subtle charm of the tenth—

I salute thee, Mantovano,
I that loved thee since my day began,
Wieler of the stateliest measure
ever moulded by the lips of man.

The only lines which, from the point of view of melody, one could compare with those are his most perfect echo of the sweeping, slumberous sea—

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound or foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

A stylist without preciosity, an artist without sensuality, an acute and alert observer of Nature without tedious technicality, a philosopher immune from the solemn humbug of profound ignorance disguised in long words, a moralist who almost always avoided the worse forms of priggishness, there is Tennyson : and his legacy, is, at its best, a gift of sheer beauty of sense, sound, form and colour, which the inartistic Victorian age hardly appraised justly, but which, as the dross of superabundance falls naturally away, the future will surely value at an ever-increasing rate.

II. *The Ethics of Browning*

SINCE the first day when some man or men left the business of conduct or action for the still more difficult process of reflecting on conduct ; when, abandoning the eager pursuit of this or that purpose, they sat down "in a cool hour" to justify their action and to ask themselves—why have a purpose at all, and, if one must, why have this rather than that ?—there have been innumerable different schools of ethical thought, and a bewildering variety of moral theories. Yet, in the main, the question of the *ground* of conduct, and therefore of Ethics, is simple ; we can really group the multiplicity of views under two heads, Intuitionism or Empiricism. In the last resort, we know right and wrong directly or indirectly. If our knowledge be direct, we are Intuitionists ; if indirect, our guide can hardly be other than experience, and we are empiricists. It is not inevitable that an Intuitionist should be a religious person, but religion is intuitional in its foundation, though in practice it garners something from experience. It is not necessary that an Empiricist should be a Hedonist : guided by experience a man might erect efficiency, or the vague notion of Perfection into an end : yet, as a matter of fact, the majority of Empiricists have been Hedonists. No Intuitionist need refuse the teachings of Experience ; and Dr. Sidgwick, in his *Methods of Ethics*, urged that the Experimental Hedonist must fall back on Intuitionism for his first principle, since no experience can prove that Happiness "ought" to be our goal.

To be complete, a System of Ethics must propound three things : an aim, a standard, and a sanction or reward. It can hardly be necessary to say that a reward need not be pleasant ; it can cover the notion of a coveted prize and also of a penalty. Both are rewards, both are retributive. In a Christian country,

or rather in one which still calls itself by that name, it is allowable to point out that Christianity on its theoretical, philosophical or theological side (whichever term people prefer to use) is intuitional. This is not to claim that practice (or experience) does not amply justify it, because it does. Still, in essence, religion is intuitional; a revelation, not a product of experience. Christianity fulfils the threefold requirement of completeness. It prescribes an end, Virtue. We may quote S. Peter, "Be ye holy,"¹ an injunction not less Christian because it harks back to the old Levitical Law. It provides a Standard of Conduct for attaining this end, in the Life of its Founder. It offers a sanction—"That ye may be the children of your Father,"² a sanction exquisitely set forth in S. Francis Xavier's Hymn *O Deus ego amo Te*.

It is almost inevitable to regard Hedonism as the typical form of Empirical Philosophy. Whether it be egoistic or altruistic, it always, as its name implies, proposes Happiness as the "End." It proposes but hardly succeeds in defining or describing it: for however carefully it be analysed, happiness seems to cover every shade of pleasurable emotion from that of—

me, fat and shining, with well cared for hide . . .
A hog from Epicurus' herd—³

to Pater's intellectualised, spiritualised, etherealised condition—"While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted finger to set the spirit free for a moment: or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours and curious odours, and work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend."⁴

As the Hedonist fails to define Happiness, so he stumbles in the matter of who and how many shall aim at this shifting goal. The famous but despairing phrase of the English Utilitarians "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," seems to renounce with a gasp of regret the possibility of the entire happiness of the whole. Still more unsuccessful is it in

¹ 1 S. Peter i. 15.

² S. Matt. v. 45.

³ Me pinguem et nitidum bene curata cute . . .
. . . Epicuri de grege porcum. (Horace Sat. I, iv., 15.)

⁴ *The Renaissance*, Walter Pater, p. 237.

proposing a "standard." Though it announces unhesitatingly that Happiness is the rational "End" of human effort, Hedonism offers no sort of clue as to the method of its attainment. As many men, so many methods, we might almost say with uncontradictable truth.

Lastly, it is not easy to say what the "sanction" of Hedonism is, for it is tangled up with its aim. Happiness seems to be not only the aim but also the reward of the wise, successful Hedonist, as pain is the penalty he suffers for any folly or failure in his career.

In this wealth of ethical choice, what election does Browning make? It is part of his originality that it is always impossible to fit him neatly into a class, no matter from what aspect we are viewing him. It is this many-sidedness, this aversion to taking any one line absolutely, irrevocably, wholly, which no doubt enabled him to enter for the time being (i.e. while he was engaged with this or that particular human creature) into the inmost feelings of people so utterly dissimilar as—to chose at random—Blougram, the hero of *The Worst of It*, Martin Relph, the Boy-officer in *An Incident of the French Camp*, Strafford, Caliban.

He approaches most nearly to an ethical system in *The Ring and the Book*, and within its limits, in the two books entitled respectively *Giuseppe Caponsacchi* and *The Pope*. Yet even here we cannot label him empiricist or intuitionist pure and simple. He seems to blend the two when Pompilia says of Romano

He fears GOD, why then need he fear the world?—¹

that reminder most of us need so often, for all the obviousness of its truth. The intuition of supreme Love and Power should, after all, arm us against "sensible experiences," whether arising from our physical environment or at the hands of our fellow creatures. Then elsewhere, he writes as if he held that experience itself is our great instrument of education—

when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end.²

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, vi., 835.

² *Ibid.*, vi., 996.

None the less, a few pages earlier, he has dropped a hint that experience is only instructive to a portion of mankind, though he suggests not obscurely that this involves a failure, since all should, though they do not, learn from and by it—

This deed you saw begin—why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson we ourselves learned, she and I
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain?¹

But while only the few do, though all should learn, the case grows more depressing still as he argues that even this few learn extremely little, barely indeed a trifle more than the Socratic wisdom which was the consciousness of ignorance, but looking like wisdom when it was set over against the common herd's ignorance of its ignorance—

Then
You were wrong you see: that's well to see, though late:
That's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave; his good is—knowing he is bad:
Thus will it be with us when the books ope
And we stand at the bar on judgment day.²

But neither is this dismal admission Browning's whole theory. If few can learn, and those few but little, yet, to the good man, ideals are given; he has a faint light round his path, above his bowed head, before his tired eyes, a gleam flickering dimly towards a hidden goal—

One evening I was sitting in a muse
Over the opened "Summa," darkened round
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life
Had shaken under me,—broke short indeed
And shew'd the gap 'twixt what is, what should be.³

Yet in the middle of this sixth book there is a suggestion of Intuitionism—

Duty is still
Wisdom: I have been wise.⁴

Now, what does Browning mean here by Wisdom? There is no denying that it may be born of experience, of mental effort, of reflexion upon experience, nay more, that it often is. But the opening words of the passage are—

I will work,
Tie down my foolish thoughts.⁵

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, vi., 77 *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, vi., 140 *et seq.*

³ *Ibid.*, vi., 483 *et seq.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi., 1053.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vi., 1049.

This at least suggests an intuitional incentive and guide to action, if man will only, if but occasionally, leave dialectics and logomachy, and listen to that monitor of whom, centuries back, the Wise Man said : " I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light : for the light that cometh from her never goeth out."¹ Whatever Browning is, he is not an empiricist pure and simple, neither is happiness his " end." His test of a man's worth we find put into the mouth of Pope Innocent XII :—

Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
Shew me thy fruit, the latest act of thine !
For in the last is summed the first and all,—
What thy life last put heart and soul into,
There shall I taste thy product,²

which, of course, means, not that it is the actual last " doing " of one, e.g. cut off suddenly, but the last deliberate, characteristic action which, according to Browning, stamps each of us, in the end of things.

In the multitude of men, may be much seeking for different ends, this one for virtue, that for happiness, the other for perfection, whatever this last may mean. But for Browning, whatever it was, it was not *pleasure*. If in the tremendous gallery of his portraits of men and women, there be one whom he seems to admire more than another, surely it is he who is addressed as " my warrior-priest," and " my athlete," Giuseppe Caponsacchi. What are the matters for which this priest is bidden to thank God ? First for

the brave starry birth
Conciliating earth with all that cloud.³

And secondly,

Was the trial sore ?
Temptation sharp ? Thank God a second time !⁴

These are hardly the average man's subjects for thanksgiving : the latter being very easy to talk about until they come in an acute form. The same Pope Innocent XII, only a few lines further on, seems to teach without the slightest misgiving,

¹ Ecclus. vii., 10.

² *The Ring and the Book*, x., 341 *et seq.*

³ *Ibid.*, x., 1154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, x., 1183.

that though ease and pleasure may be the uninspiring goal of the weak, they are no proper "end" for Life's "athletes":—

Pray

"Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!"
 Yea, but O Thou Whose servants are the bold,
 Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
 Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
 That so he may do battle and have praise!

Well done!

Be glad thou hast let light into the world
 Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—see
 The same upon thy path and march assured,
 Learning anew the use of soldiership,
 Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
 Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminating,
 Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more
 Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son! ¹

Browning's "end" is the Christian end, virtue through suffering and discipline, never inglorious pleasure

propt on beds of amaranth and moly.

If any one will argue that proof resting merely on the Pope's words to Caponsacchi, is too slender, let him turn to S. John's emphatic dictum in *A Death in the Desert*:—

When pain ends gain ends too.²

The same doctrine of attainment through sacrifice inspires Rabbi Ben Ezra—

Then welcome each rebuff
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand, but go!
 Be our joys three parts pain!
 Strive and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe.

There is no narrow restrictedness of "end," the achievement may be intellectual, moral or spiritual, but from Browning's point of view it must possess the qualities of rightness and achievedness.

It is impossible to proceed further with a discussion of his ethics unless his psychological view of man's nature is set forth: Ethics cannot remain suspended in the air apart altogether from Psychology. To Browning, always the ego,

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, x., 1188 et seq.

² *A Death in the Desert*.

the soul was a real personality, independent for its existence of its capacities ; it was no agglomeration of merging and conflicting " presentations," no mere arena, whereon outward stimuli met and arranged their affairs, as Herbart would ask us to believe ; nor a series unconnected with a real central personal " I," as some modern American thinkers tell us. To him, the Ego was the core of the man, the real person for whom " presentations " existed, before whom they came and went, or with whom they stayed. His theory, though already quite clear and distinct, is simplest in his earlier years. We may take his first poem, *Pauline*, written in the year 1833, and here we find his psychological view of Man's self, as he found it in his own case :—

I am made up of an intensest life,
Of a most clear idea of consciousness,
Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers.

But he is not only aware of this self : he finds it a being which longs for GOD :—

And of my powers, one springs up to save
From utter death a soul with such desires
Confined to clay . . .

Has been an angel to me, coming not
In fitful visions, but beside me ever,
And never failing me.

But I have always had one lode-star ; now
As I look back, I see that I have wasted
Or progressed as I looked forward to that star—
A need, a trust, a yearning after God :
A feeling I have analysed but late,
But it existed, and was reconciled
With a neglect of all I deemed His laws.

I felt as one beloved, and so shut in
From fear . . .
—for I saw GOD everywhere.

Then, in *Christmas Eve*, which came considerably later, not indeed till 1850, we find at first a similar attitude—

I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O GOD and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou !
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimiate,
With this sky of Thine, that I now walk under ;

then later on comes a more developed and more essentially Christian doctrine—

Though He is so bright, and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him ;
And were no eye in us to tell
Instructed by no inner sense
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
The light would want its evidence.

Fourteen years later, in 1864, Browning wrote *A Death in the Desert* ; and there put into the mouth of S. John the Divine the still more psychologically and theologically developed view of

What Does, what Knows, what Is ; three souls, one man,

and that other, so characteristic exposition of Man's nature—

God's gift was that man should conceive of truth
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.

By the time that he wrote *Ferishtah's Fancies*, namely in 1884, he had arrived at the point where psychology merges itself in ethics, where thought yields to feeling—

The prize is in the process : knowledge means
Ever renewed assurance by defeat
That victory is somehow still to reach,
But love is victory, the prize itself :
Love—trust to !¹

Turning aside for a moment from our subject, we might say that Browning, though never a Catholic, nor, contemplated from non-Catholics' point of view, even orthodox in their sense, yet, in a limited degree, travelled along the mystic way of purgation to illumination, till at any rate he realised in what " Union " consists,—

Love is victory, the prize itself.

But this is an anticipation, a conclusion reached before we have gone through the stages of his ethical theory. In passing, it may however be noted how clearly this magnificent poem of his later years—*A Pillar at Sebzevar*—testifies to his intuitional standpoint. Despite his admiration for reason and his unusual capacity for argument, he takes an intuitional view,

¹ *A Pillar at Sebzevar*, vol. xvi., p. 63.

and realises that the highest achievement comes not through intellect alone, but demands feeling too, if not instead—

Consider well !
Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God
Must be ignored : love gains Him by first leap.¹

And again—

So let us say—not ' Since we know, we love,'
But rather ' Since we love, we know enough.'²

When he speaks of love, he means love, not sentimentality. He makes short work of all flabby sensuous emotion ; and for that very reason he becomes the great exponent, in the rather unpropitious environment of Victorian England too, of love as the proper atmosphere of all great action. It may be love of man and woman—

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonize,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize !³

Or—

Once and only once and for one only⁴

Or—

He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul⁵

Or more triumphant still—

O Lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire.⁶

Or again, it may be the tragedy of that love which though wrapped in shame is yet immortal, as he limns it in the strangely moving poem which contains these stanzas—

She ruined ? How ? No Heaven for her ?
Crowns to give, and none for the brow
That look'd like marble and smelt like myrrh ?
Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne
And she go graceless, she graced now
Beyond all saints, as themselves aver ?

¹ *The Collected Poems of Browning*, vol. xvi., p. 67.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65. ³ *By the Fireside.*

⁴ *One Word More.*

⁵ *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

⁶ *The Ring and the Book*, i., 1391.

Dear, I look from my hiding place.
 Are you still so fair ? Have you still the eyes ?
 Be happy ! Add but the other grace,
 Be good ! Why want what the angels vaunt ?
 I knew you once : but in Paradise,
 If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.¹

Where else in English literature has illicit love come so near to redeeming itself as in that last line ?

Or it may be the love of an ideal, as Browning has caught and for ever imprisoned it in *Pictor Ignotus*—

These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
 Count them for garniture and household stuff,
 And where they live needs must our pictures live. . . .

Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
 These endless cloisters and eternal aisles,
 With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
 With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard,—
 At least no merchant traffics in my heart.

Finally, Browning expounds the reality of the rarest of all feelings, spiritual love, the love of spirit for spirit. He never gives us any ground for supposing that he thought it common or usual, but certainly he knew that it was possible. No doubt it is as rare in occurrence as in quality : no doubt the semblance of it has been used on occasion as a cloke for vile and base passion, yet the fact of its reality remains, and Browning knew it ; for he, like Shakspeare, had knowledge of the deep depths of human nature, and a hold on those eternal things which transcend the transient shows of life, and are firm beneath our feet when Time is one long care and Space full of horror.

It is a delicate theme this ethereal love. Probably, for ever here it will remain part of that great

all, the world's coarse thumb
 And finger failed to plumb.

It is again the "warrior-priest," the athlete of heroic virtue, the faithful priest of GOD whom Browning chooses as his exponent. He puts his high reality into the most dangerous environment possible and brings it out victorious. As Pompilia lies dying, murdered by that unutterable husband,

¹ *The Worst of It.*

Caponsacchi relates wearily, for the second time, his efforts to save the girl-child, who, as Pope Innocent declared, had

By God's gift a purity of soul
That will not take pollution.¹

To his overstrained mind and heart, all this unreasonable legal trifling, all this pompous evasion of the real issue, as the Law ever tries to evade, is well-nigh intolerable :—

Answer you ? Then that means
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago :

I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me,—there and thus she lies !
Men, for the last time, what do you want with me ?²

As the criminality and misery of it all overwhelms him, standing there before those futile judges, wild and bitter words burst from him—

I want no more with earth,
Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
For a moment, show Pompilia who was true !
Not for her sake, but yours : if she is dead,
Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
Most or least priestly ! Saints, to do us good,
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand :
We never find them saints before at least.
Be her first prayer then presently for you—
She has done the good to me.³

And then, remembering the obtuseness, the blundering stupidity of the average person, and the not uncommon tendency to impute of all possible motives the very worst, he catches himself up suddenly—

What is all this ?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool !
This is a foolish outset :—might with cause
Give colour to the very lie o' the man,
The murderer,—make as if I loved his wife
In the way he called love.⁴

Again his mood changes, and careless of the injunction *Nolite dare sanctum canibus*, he expounds to those worldly peddling materialists, all involved, tied-up though they be

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, x., 1, 678.

² *Ibid.*, vi., 5-7, and 103 *et seq.*

³ *Ibid.*, vi., ll. 169 *et seq.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 180 *et seq.*

in their legal quibblings, the sanctities of spiritual love ; doing it, because, despite his broken-hearted wrath, the great Love of all love,—of which his for Pompilia was part—shone in his soul and lighted him along the dim way to their dark, undeveloped potentialities :—

You are Christians ; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the LORD,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better.¹

And so, patiently, he rehearses again the long involved tale, and as he tells the light waxes, the intrinsic truth expands :—

No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead !
That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal, (oh, that voice of hers !)
That vision in the blood-red day-break—that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
O' the lady !

Come, let me see her—indeed
It is my duty being a priest.

I never touched her with my finger tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten : that is why
—To get leave and go and see her of your grace—
I have told you this whole story over again.

My part was just to tell you how things stand,
State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
But then 'tis a priest speaks : as for love,—no !
If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong ! We had no thought
Of such infatuation, she and I.²

If then, according to Browning, love be the proper atmosphere of all high doing, in what does the “doing” itself consist ? Perhaps the completest answer is that it is the action, sometimes intellectual, sometimes moral, sometimes spiritual (not that these can be separated actually and entirely in fact, as, so often, we essay to divide them in thought)—of a state of continuous development ; action always progressing, always increasingly attaining to a given end, right

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, vi., ll. 211 *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, vi., ll. 1599 *et seq.*, and ll. 1967 *et seq.*

achievement, yet without finality here : a tendency, always nearing, yet ever falling short of a goal hidden beyond the confines of our present conditions.

If Browning were surer of one truth than of another, it was that this life on earth is the first step in a process whose end is elsewhere. Over and over, in one form or another, in poems written at different times, he repeats this thesis ; his mood may change, his " men and women " may be as far sundered as the poles, but his theme is one and the same. Perhaps his most succinct rendering of the doctrine is the single line in that poem of the Forties—

Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven.¹

In his grim poem of squandered opportunity, written in 1864, we find the same thought, put this time in the guise of a question to those who have missed Life's point—

Was there nought better than to enjoy ?
No feat which, done, would make time break
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity, our due ?
No forcing earth teach Heaven's employ ?

No wise beginning, here and now,
What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)
And Heaven must finish there and then ?²

If we turn to *The Ring and the Book*, whose whole line of treatment is casuistical, we find the same doctrine. Caponsacchi—the passage has been quoted already—takes a somewhat gloomy view of man's achievement here :

You were wrong, you see : that's well to see, though late :
That's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave ; his good is—knowing he is bad.³

It appears a little less dimly in his admission :—

when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end.⁴

But it is by the pronouncement of Pope Innocent that the doctrine is emphatically set forth—

I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;
All to the very end is trial in life :
At this stage is the trial of my soul
Danger to face, or danger to refuse ?⁵

¹ *Old Pictures in Florence.*

² *Dis Aliter Visum.*

³ *The Ring and the Book*, vi., l. 141.

⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 996.

⁵ *Ibid.*, x., l. 1303.

A captious critic might urge that the word trial is slightly ambiguous : yet, whatever meaning be attached to it, the dictum is in line with later, quite unambiguous statements :—

This life is training and a passage¹

and again—

Life is probation and the earth no goal
But starting-point of man.²

The date of *The Ring and the Book* is 1868-9. Some seven years later, in 1876, we find *Pacchiarotto* proposing the same tenet in an arresting question—

Art thou so unsuspicious
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing
His part in the after construction
—Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction ?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal.

A question in almost identical form enforces the same proposition in *Rephan*, a poem occurring towards the end of Browning's last volume, finished in October, but published at Asolo, on the very day of his death, on December 12, 1889 :—

Have you no assurance that, earth at end,
Wrong will prove right ? Who made shall mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend.

This somewhat loose and easy optimism is restored to the higher level to which Pope Innocent raised it, in other lines in *Rephan*—

Above
Supremacy ever—to move, remove,

Not reach—aspire yet never attain
To the object aimed at.

It is very much the fashion, and had begun to be in Browning's day, to regard "wrong" as a form of "right," if you can only see it so. But the sterner doctrine that wrong is really wrong though allowed its part in chiselling character—

Many a blow and biting sculpture
Fashioned well those stones elect,

is never shut out by Browning. The purpose underlying the

¹ *The Ring and the Book*, x., l. 1411.

² *Ibid.*, x., l. 1436.

doctrine, which he enunciates over and over again, is put into Norbert's mouth—

I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, to educe the man.¹

Yet Browning's doctrine is not individualistic. It is not to be forgotten that at this very time, the predominant English School of Philosophy, that of J. S. Mill and his school, was maintaining altruistic utilitarianism. Though Browning was an intuitionist, not a utilitarian nor hedonist, he never slipped into pure egoism. Though he persistently maintained the individual's obligation to develop himself, it was, however little dogmatically set forth, on the Christian principle that we are members one of another. The whole system of human life he saw as a cosmos, wherein each individual has his appointed and contributive rôle. He puts the theory tentatively into the mouth of the Epicurean Cleon who while dreading

The consummation coming past escape
When I shall know most and yet least enjoy

clutches eagerly, hungrily at any and every philosophic guess which may make a way of escape, even so shadowy a happiness as his dream of finding solace in the future of the whole—

what we call this life of man on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievement here,
Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analysed to parts,
But each part having reference to all.

Nowhere does he more definitely insist on the inter-relation of the individual and the community than in *By the Fireside*—

each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan ;
Each living his own, to boot :

while in *Old Pictures in Florence* he blends this theory with the other that life here is probation for a future elsewhere—

the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
And grow here according to God's clear plan ;

¹ *In a Balcony.*

and still more subtly a few stanzas on—

Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done ;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God.

Browning is not content to preach the doctrine of the individual's essential share and responsibility in the common life : he rules out selfish individualism utterly. It would be difficult indeed to think of a severer condemnation of the not uncommon hypothesis of self-centred souls that a divine choice cuts them off from the rest, singles them out for some shining part, relieves them from the dull duties of the common herd, than *Paracelsus*. It does not avail him even that he believes that his unique mission is to end in the service of the community, and that he does believe this is abundantly evident—

If I can serve mankind
'Tis well—

for Festus, clear-sighted as those are whose unselfishness is greater than their intellectual capacity, is not taken in. In the very speech where *Paracelsus* uses the words quoted above, Festus instantly detects the "plague-spot" portending ruin.

If I can serve mankind
'Tis well ; but there our intercourse must end :
I never will be served by those I serve—

declares the arrogant aspirant to Absolute Truth. But Festus roundly breaks in on his insolence—

Look well to this ; here is a plague-spot here
Disguise it as you may ! . . .
'Tis but a spot as yet : but it will break
Into a hideous blotch if overlooked.

A little later, he elaborates his plea with more definiteness—

But do not cut yourself from human weal !
You cannot thrive—a man that dares affect
To spend his life in service to his kind
For no reward of theirs, unbound to them
By any tie ; nor do so, Aureole ! No—
There are strange punishments for such.

When this headlong, self-elected benefactor of the human race, who brooks no return from his fellows, persists in

scorning and casting aside these warnings, it is only that he may be reduced, at no long distance of time, to the utterance of his heart-rending appeals to the dying poet, Aprile—

merciful God, forgive us both !
We wake at length from weary dreams : but both
Have slept in fairy-land : though dark and drear
Appears the world before us, we no less
Wake with our wrists and ankles jewelled still.
I too have sought to KNOW as thou to LOVE—
Excluding love as thou refusedst knowledge.

A tyro in human perversities and shifts might mistake such a plea for a final recantation. But repentance is no such easy matter : the old craving for egotistical power returns ; and Paracelsus comes to be even able to jeer at his glimpse of truth—

God ! how I essayed
To live like that mad poet, for a while,
To love alone ; and how I felt too warped
And twisted and deformed ! What should I do,
Even tho' released from drudgery, but return
Faint, as you see, and halting, blind and sore,
To my old life,—and die as I begun !

One by one, life's misfortunes,—that heaviest of all, his fellows' ingratitude—fall on him ; and still, the indomitable egotism persists—

I will fight the battle out ; a little spent
Perhaps, but still an able combatant.

Then, at last, Browning, whose temperamental mercifulness equalled his rare understanding of human nature, puts into the dying man's mouth the sore confession of failure. Though, long since, he learned from Aprile the vital value of love, yet he had learned awry and so partially—

I learned my own deep error ; love's undoing
Taught me the worth of love in man's estate,
And what proportion love should hold with power
In his right constitution : love preceding
Power, and with much power, always much more love ;

I learned this, and supposed the whole was learned—

and because he had only partly learned, he had a weary way to travel before he discovered that the supposed " whole "

was, *pace* the mathematician within him, much the smaller half—

and why ?

In my own heart love had not been made wise
To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
To know even hate is but a mask of love's
To see a good in evil, and a hope
In ill-success ; to sympathise, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts ;
All with a touch of nobleness, despite
Their error, upward tending all, though weak
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get at him
All this I knew not and I failed.

Perhaps here he overstates as once he fell short, but he has indeed journeyed far from the days of

If I can serve mankind
'Tis well, but there our intercourse must end,
I never will be served by those I serve.

Yet, whatever he may once have thought or felt concerning those he served, it is they who have led him to that sense of entire failure which Browning, with characteristic irony, calls his attainment—

Let men
Regard me, and the poet dead long ago
Who loved too rashly ; and shape forth a third
And better-tempered spirit, warned by both—

a telling plea entered for the restraint of egotism by the obligations of humanity.

All readers of Browning's last volume, *Asolando*, and possibly more who have never actually handled the book, know and extol the closing poem, the famous *Epilogue*. And indeed it had all the qualities most certain to endear it to the men and women of his race, manly courage, a human appeal, music of verse, clearness of aim and expression. Yet, the poem immediately preceding, though its length and involutions will always preserve it from popularity, really deserves more attention : here he sets forth prophetically as it were, the doctrine of the perpetual, though not necessarily rhythmical, progress of the race, and of individuals as integral parts of it ; with his other doctrine of the life begun here, in a state of

probation, that its consummation may be elsewhere, and bound up with these his peculiarly individual handling of the relations between power and love. Here he seems to sum up his ethical system once and whole and for the last time—

I for my race and me
Shall apprehend life's law :
In this legend of man shall see
Writ large what small I saw
In my life's tale : both agree.

As the record from youth to age
Of my own, the single soul—
So the world's wide book : one page
Deciphered explains the whole
Of our common heritage

Leap of man's quickened heart,
Throe of his thought's escape,
Stings of his soul which dart

Through the barrier of flesh, till keen
She climbs from the calm and clear,
Through turbidity all between,
From the known to the unknown here,
Heaven's " Shall be " from Earth's " Has been ? "

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love . . .

When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
When the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

Senes vestri somnia somniabunt, et juvenes vestri visiones videbunt,¹ GOD said, speaking through His prophet. What words can better sum up Browning's philosophical outlook, beginning with his youthfulest work *Pauline*, and passing on to the *Reverie* of his latest years ? It was an outlook always really at harmony with itself, yet growing in clearness and richness as he dwelt ever more closely, more penetratingly on the problems of life and mind.

¹ Joel ii. 28 (Vulgate).

III. The Poetry of Doubt

THE Nineteenth Century was, as we look back on it, and surely seemed so as we were passing through it, a strange medley: a period of contradictions, of religious speculation, of blunt denials, of frank materialism, an age, whatever else it was, of sharply contrasted moods and sudden changes. It argued and wrangled, it made positive statements, contradicting them as positively; it declared that nothing worth knowing could really and truly be known, and thereupon proceeded to dwell in a foolish and child-like security. It broke its heart here, boldly flung its faith to the winds there; it busied itself with the creation of new systems, it spent immense pains on the recovery of lost or buried treasures. One set of thinkers, in word and thought and deed flatly contradicted another; not seldom, feeling ran high. Some of the best of men were flung into prison at the instance—one may not complete the antithesis neatly by saying of the worst, but must call them rather the stupidly, densely narrow, the ignorantly persuaded. One thing, however, this era of strife and confusion did avoid, the sin of Laodicea. Whatever charge be brought against the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, that of indifference can hardly lie.

The historian of the future may be surprised at the separated, compartmental way in which these methods were handled and these speculations wrought. Carried on side by side, in this small land of ours, great movements matured without working any marked mutual effect. For example, whatever sentiments men may entertain towards the Oxford Movement, no thoughtful student can deny its fundamental importance or its far-stretching influence. Yet alongside of it there grew up a development of philosophic doubt, whose effect, for some decades, was also potent and far-reaching. A further remarkable fact is that protagonists of both move-

ments were not only to be found in the two older Universities, but that they could not, in many cases, have been unknown to each other, while in some instances they were even related. Yet these currents ran on side by side, gathering volume, but never really approaching, until the one began, at last, to perish of its own innate tendency to drought.

It will be difficult indeed, in the future, for students of this period to recover vividly a sense of the thin, dry, chill, eviscerated doubt which culminated at Cambridge in the eighties. Movements like it, but not identical, existed elsewhere. For example, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* for July, 1877, Professor W. K. Clifford had given utterance to something resembling the gentle longing doubt which was familiar to Cambridge students a decade later : " Many names of Gods of many shapes have men given to this presence : seeking by names and pictures to know more clearly, and to remember more continually the guide and the helper of men. No such comradeship with the Great Companion shall have anything but reverence from me, who have known the divine gentleness of Denison Maurice, the strong and practical instinct of Charles Kingsley, and who now revere with all my heart the teaching of James Martineau. They seem to me, one and all, to be reaching forward with loving anticipation to a clearer vision which is yet to come—*tendentesque manus ripæ ulterioris amore*. For, after all, such a helper of men, outside humanity, the truth will not allow us to see. The dim and shadowy outlines of the superhuman deity fade slowly away from before us ; and as the mist of his presence floats aside, we perceive with greater and greater clearness the shape of a yet grander and nobler figure—of Him who made all Gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of History, and from the inmost depth of every soul, the face of our father Man looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in his eyes and says ' Before Jehovah was, I am.' "

Were there any indication that the writer had ever really grasped the deep realities of Christianity as these were realised, e.g. by S. John or S. Paul, or by Thomas Aquinas, or Thomas à Kempis or S. Teresa, a reader could only stand aghast at the blasphemy of this passage. But nescience,

ignorance, unawareness cannot be so charged : they must be judged from an intellectual standpoint rather. If the words be weighed in Reason's balance it is pretty safe to suggest that though Professor Sidgwick would have thought the sentimental dogmatism of the closing lines as incapable of rigid proof as any Catholic doctrine could possibly be, and surely, in itself, infinitely absurd, he could have sympathised to some extent with the beginning of the passage.

Far more would he have understood a confession which appeared two years later in the *Nineteenth Century* : " Now whether or no it be reasonable and satisfying to the conscience, it cannot be doubted that theistic belief is a comfort and a solace to those who hold it, and that the loss of it is a very painful loss. It cannot be doubted, at least by many of us in this generation, who either profess it now, or received it in our childhood, and have parted from it since with such searching trouble as only cradle faiths can cause. We have seen the spring sun shine out of an empty heaven to light up a soulless earth, we have felt with utter loneliness that the Great Companion is dead. Our children it may be hoped will know that sorrow only by the reflex light of a wondering compassion. But to say that theistic belief is a comfort and a solace, and to say that it is the crown and coping of morality, these are different things."

But Professor Clifford parts company with Cambridge doubt when he violently attacks Christian orthodoxy and Catholic Order. While Professor Sidgwick could write : " There seem to me only two alternatives ; either my own reason or some external authority ; and if the latter, as my own reason would have to be exercised for the last time in choosing my authority, I should not hesitate to choose the Roman Church on broad historic grounds."¹

Professor Clifford in a vein worthy of some of the bitter onslaughts on Christianity made at the height of the Elementary Education controversy about 1870, could publish in the July *Fortnightly Review*, 1877, this sweeping abuse : " If there is one lesson which history forces upon us in every page, it is this : *keep your children away from the*

¹ To Mr. J. R. Mozley, January 11, 1891.

priest or he will make them the enemies of mankind. It is not the Catholic clergy and those like them who are alone to be dreaded in this matter : even the representatives of apparently harmless religions may do incalculable mischief if they get education into their hands."

With still more crude violence, he wrote in his *Nineteenth Century* article, already quoted above : " On the other hand, there is one ' decline of religious belief ' inseparable from a revolution in human conduct, which would indeed be a frightful disaster to mankind. A revival of any form of sacerdotal Christianity would be a matter of practice and not a matter of theory. The system which sapped the foundations of patriotism in the old world ; which well-nigh eradicated the sense of intellectual honesty and seriously weakened the habit of truth-speaking, which lowered men's reverence for the marriage bond by placing its sanctions in a realm outside of nature instead of in the common life of men, and by the institution of monasticism and a celibate clergy which stunted the moral sense of the nations by putting a priest between every man and his conscience ; this system, if it should ever return to power, must be expected to produce worse evils than those which it has worked in the past. The house which it once made desolate has been partially swept and garnished by the free-play gained for the natural goodness of men." (Oh, shade of Rousseau !) " It would come back accompanied by social diseases perhaps worse than itself, and the wreck of civilised Europe would be darker than the darkest of past ages."

" The Great Companion is dead ! " That phrase remains in the mind—when this riotous outburst against the Christian priesthood is forgotten—as the characteristic and pathetic summary of an attitude common enough in the middle decades of the last century, some trace of it ever clinging about the teachers of philosophic doubt. Yet the mood of the teacher does not always pass into the pupil's experience so easily as the thing taught.

A Philosophy built so largely, as Cambridge " doubt " was, on the one and best-known work of Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, while the other, *The Critique of Prac-*

tical Reason, was less forgotten or totally neglected than quietly swept aside as a conventional and discreet sop to outraged orthodoxy, such a philosophy could have no result other than to leave those, who listened and learned, with a stunned consciousness of complete devastation and irremediable destruction, just because the conclusions were isolated in their minds, unsoftened by the speaker's mood.

First, the understanding was separated from feeling and will ; next, it was elevated to a sovereign place in human life. How otherwise ? If feeling and will be brushed aside, reason naturally slips into the judgment seat and becomes sole arbitrator. Then, with unerring, convincing logic, the three great problems, the existence of GOD, the immortality of the Soul, the freedom of the Will were declared to be beyond, outside of the Pure Reason's domain, beyond its furthest powers of apprehension or discovery. And the demonstration appeared cogent, invincible.

The deed was done ; and that small part of humanity which attended to these particular academic sayings and doings, was robbed of its most precious treasure, robbed of it until such time—and in some cases such time was very long in coming—as it orientated itself, and woke up to question the premises, to ask why understanding, why intellect should arrogate to itself the right to seize all power, and to take the settlement of everything into its own sole hands ; woke up to the crucial fact that the incapacity of the Finite to grasp the Infinite was no sound argument for the non-existence of Infinity : woke up too to a truth so obvious that its previous obscurity seemed more than strange, viz. that Kant was not the only philosopher who ever made statements to the world, and realised too that besides philosophers there were poets and theologians, that if a man turned to Shakspeare he might learn

" What a piece of work is man : how noble in reason ! how infinite
in faculty !
... in apprehension how like a god ! "

More movingly still he might realise with Blaise Pascal that
" L'homme n'est qu'un roseau le plus faible de la nature,

mais c'est un roseau pensant. Il ne faut pas que l'univers entier s'arme pour l'écraser. Une vapeur, une goutte d'eau suffit pour le tuer. Mais quand l'univers l'écraserait, l'homme serait encore plus noble que ce qui le tue, parce qu'il sait qu'il meurt ; et l'avantage que l'univers a sur lui, l'univers n'en sait rien. Ainsi, toute notre dignité consiste dans la pensée. C'est de là qu'il faut nous relever, non de l'espace et de la durée."¹

But by the time that any one could grasp Pascal's meaning, the first step towards the return to faith had been taken. Pascal's use of "thought," coupled with his deliberate rejection of the materialism which dwells within the boundaries of Space and Time, was diametrically opposed to the dubiety following on the dialectics which absorbed the philosophers of the mid and later Victorian days.

No doubt, the intrinsic irrationality of the extreme rationalistic position is evident enough now. But it was not at all obvious to academic youth in the last half of the last century. The assumption of the universal and sole right of reason to arbitrate was made so coolly ; the possibility that regions of thought exist where Authority not only may operate legitimately but must guide us if we have a guide at all, was so serenely ignored ; the barring out of intuition was so thorough ; the lack of any awareness or recollection of saintliness, of mysticism was so complete, that even intelligent students accepted Reason as the one instrument of knowledge, without so much as one *arrière-pensée*. When its only too obvious limitations were demonstrated, when they grasped its total inability to prove by itself and alone anything of vital, moral, spiritual or religious worth, their undoing was accomplished ; and in the ensuing stripped and shivering emptiness they listened aghast to the dull thud of the poet's dictum—

For nothing worthy proving can be proven
Nor yet disproven,

and it seemed but a careless fatuity of puerile optimism which prompted the rest—

¹ *Pensées*, i., l. vi.

wherefore be thou wise,
 Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt
 And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith.

That might seem well enough for—

light half-believers of our casual creeds,

but the man or woman who has been ruthlessly, irrevocably robbed of the treasure of life does not easily give fresh hostages to Fortune. The way was long, steep, indescribably cheerless and painful before any streaks of another dawn returned ; that blessed gleam in the dun-coloured but at last fretted East, the gleam of hope, the suggestion,—why, after all, should Reason be sole arbitrator ? What of Revelation, what of the moral sense, what of love and will, what, in a word, of a man's whole self ? Why accord this easy acquiescence to an arbitrary, unbottomed, essentially irrational isolation and apotheosis of Reason ?

But the return could only be bought at immense cost, and it may be doubted if all ever did return. The philosophy of mid and later Victorian Cambridge if not forgotten already, will soon lose even its shrunken vitality, and fade into oblivion; but since it had unique qualities, and since recurrence is of the essence of ideas, it is rather more than worth while to put on record facts and reflexions thereon which may possibly preserve a memory of an actual phase of life. It must be remembered that neither the drab dreariness of the Positivists, nor that faint trace of *bourgeoisie* which betrayed—with the exception of John Stuart Mill—the leading Utilitarians, had any disqualifying analogue in the “philosophic doubt” of Cambridge. A more winning personality, a more fearless gallant quest for Truth cost what the issue might, a more chivalrous longing that Truth might finally be proved to be at least not incompatible with the Christian Faith, a more stainless flawless character were surely never combined than met in the great Teacher who led the scant generations of philosophically-minded Youth, one after another, along those white, cold, irrevocable ways to a withering dubiety, which came at last to doubt itself along with everything else. Where the pitiless dialectic had passed, there the world of articulated ideas, of dreams, of creeds, of philosophies lay in

ruins: it was no mere sapping of foundations, but a remorseless demonstration of the native incapacity of the human mind to lay any sort of foundations at all, or to build any superstructure thereupon.

That was the desolating issue for those youthful searchers after Truth who followed with awed amazement the relentless wrecking not of this or that system, not of one proposition or another, but of the capacity of the human intellect to establish any definite conclusion whatever about anything outside the domain of the exact sciences. It was understood that, in a general way, such propositions as that the three interior angles of every triangle are together equal to two right angles, are, *cæteris paribus*, sufficiently demonstrable to pass muster for daily use. Though this might be expected to rank as consolation in so denuded a world, yet there was a serious drawback: not only were such truths not really urgent in ordinary daily life, but where everything of vital human and divine moment had been swept away, the deprived heart did not find itself able to care greatly whether they were equal to two, or two million, or to nothing.

In 1887, this great teacher wrote: "At present, the recognised failure of my efforts to obtain evidence of immortality affects me not as a Man but as a Moralist. . . . I should say 'morality can take [care] of itself, or rather the principle of life in human society can take care of morality.' But how? Perhaps always by producing an illusory belief in immortality in the average man, who must live content with Common Sense. . . . I said in 1874, that without some datum beyond experience 'the Cosmos of Duty is reduced to a Chaos.' Am I to recant this conviction, and answer my own arguments. . . . Or am I to use my position—and draw my salary—for teaching that Morality is a chaos, from the point of view of Practical Reason, adding cheerfully that as man is not after all a rational being, there is no real fear that morality won't be kept up somehow."¹

It surely is not wonderful if some of his pupils, listening to the lectures engendered by such a mental condition, were bewildered and even dismayed. What consolation could be

¹ Henry Sidgwick: *A Memoir*, pp. 471-2.

found in a philosophy which resolved hope into the issue of a delusion entertained by average mortals? Who ever admitted that he himself was average? Who ever cared for the supposed comforts of that discredited multitude?

It is true that he offered them "Common Sense": but its total failure and incapacity was the abiding theme of his lectures, and the doctrine of his treatise on Ethics. It was not only that another great Cambridge teacher was expounding simultaneously Kant's doctrine of the "Pure Reason," which, as has already been said, cut away humanity's chance of reasoning beyond experience, but now the race was deprived of all hope of rescue by experience, by what it was the fashion to call "Common Sense." Nothing could stand against such a combination of destructive dialectics, set forth quietly and reasonably by means of profound intellect of generous sensitive veracity and candour, save an impervious stupidity so dense that neither a difficulty nor a solution could penetrate it, or the firmest foundation of sacramental teaching, so authoritative and deep-rooted in practice as to be "real," and not merely a donned and doffed garment. This last is less common in England than it should be, and was rarer in Cambridge in the eighties than perhaps it is now.

No words can describe adequately the emptiness and lonely chill of a world thus philosophically stripped: the devastation was rendered more acutely painful, more awful (in the true sense) by the fact that, in England, philosophy is the pursuit of the infinitesimally few; therefore this scanty handful of students suffered the further misery of living, how unwillingly only they knew, as the initiated into a certainty of universal, negative helplessness in the midst of a world as positively light-heartedly happy as they themselves had once been; of living as those aware of a heavy secret ignored by the multitude in its blissful if deceived content. For some of them the philosophic situation was further intensified by the Poetry of Doubt, which from Clough onwards had perhaps to the general public—so far as the general public can be said to be aware of poetry—merely given an exciting sensation, but which seemed to rivet still faster upon them those iron bands which philosophy had forged. The painful quality of this

wave of thought, whether frigidly demonstrated by thinkers or plangently sung by poets, was the bitter note of loss which swelled and sank and swelled again.

The Eighteenth Century had revelled in its cold and sterile wisdom; the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth paraded gaily their easily-won freedom from religious fetters, its total indifference to the things of Faith: but the last half of the Victorian period avowed its impotence along with its imperishable desire to believe. Of all the heart-breaking utterances which proclaimed this, the most penetrating, perhaps, are the brief sentence quoted above from Professor Clifford's writings, and Frederic Myers' tragic appeal—

O somewhere, somewhere, GOD unknown
Exist and be !
I am dying ; I am all alone ;
I must have Thee !

GOD ! GOD ! my sense, my soul, my all
Dies in the cry :—
Saw'st thou the faint star flame and fall ?
Ah ! it was I !

Between 1850, when Clough's *Dipsychus* appeared, and 1889, when Amy Levy's *A London Plane Tree* was posthumously published, a thin stream of poetry, often beautiful, not seldom, with its delicate note of regretfulness, persuasive, watered the drier levels of philosophic theory. Some one, probably the Monthly Magazines, copying Socrates, had in Montaigne's phrase brought Philosophy down from heaven. The earth-born, seizing upon it, not very dexterously or sagely, proceeded to apply it to the conclusions of Theology and Religion. By means, in strenuous quarters, of solid academic treatises, and in less weighty circles, of Magazine articles, and more than either, probably by the efforts of the Poets,—Clough, Arnold, to some extent Tennyson, Myers and Amy Levy, the habit of doubt grew and spread; until to have lost one's faith became, among many, the sign of superior intellect, while to be orthodox was held a sure proof either of inferior brain power, or of an ingrained habit and conventionality which no intellectual argument could disturb. A few shallow pagans even hailed it as a sign of self-seeking, worldly wisdom.

So far as the poets were concerned, the main elements in their attitude were the same, the most noteworthy perhaps being the manifest absence of any real systematic theological training and knowledge. For instance, no one who had been regularly instructed in dogmatic theology, with that kind of skilled instruction which all educated people demand in the Humanities and Sciences, would write with Clough—

By Him who gave you birth
And blended you with earth
Was some good end designed
For man and woman-kind ;
Ah yet ! ye vague desires,
Ah yet !¹

That is not the kind of unbelief or doubt which follows the loss of a Faith which has been soundly and thoroughly taught. The same may be said of the following stanza from the section labelled " Religious Poems,"—

O Thou in that mysterious shrine
Enthroned as I must say divine !
I will not frame one thought of what
Thou mayest either be or not.
I will not prate of " thus " and " so,"
And be profane with " yes " and " no,"
Enough that in our soul and heart
Thou, whatso'er Thou may'st be, art.²

As a matter of fact, experience proved over and over again that such a vague dreamy hypothesis is not " enough " when men and women step down into the toiling, striving arena of the world, when they are harassed by cares, and broken with pain and sorrow.

Again, perhaps nothing is more strangely unaccountable than the indubitable fact that people who would be the very first to demand strenuous labour, patient observation, long toil in the business of acquiring any secular knowledge should, when the matter is religious or theological, fall back on vague speculation, based far less on learning than on sentimental desire and insubstantial optimism. Why in the name of common sense should the outcome of a hard theo-

¹ *Poems*, by Arthur Hugh Clough, Eleventh Edition, 1885, p. 141.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

logical course be, as Clough seems to imply it might, prating or profanity? When he writes—

Ah yet, when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head,
Still what we hope we must believe,
And what is given us receive ;
Must still believe for still we hope
That in a world of larger scope
What here is faithfully begun
Will be completed not undone—

it is hard to realise that eighteen centuries of Christian life and experience lay behind him. After all, the history of the Church, the writings and the reliable Lives of the Saints give some better ground for forming a judgment than the sad gropings of one disillusioned mortal however distinguished and learned. But so many of those who doubted were profoundly ignorant of the History and Doctrine of the Church. The question once put suddenly—"Have you read Theology as diligently as the Philosophy of Doubt?" was not only most pertinent, comparable indeed to the turning of an electric torch into a dark and cobwebby corner, but, in most cases, only admitted of one answer, the negative. No one can pretend to deny that some men and women who have received the most systematic and firmly based religious instruction occasionally depart, lose their way, and fall into unbelief. But whatever their doubt, it lacks this peculiar hazy sentimentality of half-taught or ignorant individual, languid search. This point may be illustrated by the Preface of Francis Jammes to *De l'Angelus de l'Aube à l'Angelus du Soir* :—

"Mon DIEU, vous m'avez appelé parmi les hommes. Me voici. Je souffre et j'aime. J'ai parlé avec la voix que vous m'avez donnée. J'ai écrit avec les mots que vous avez enseignés à ma mère et à mon père, qui me les ont transmis. Je passe sur la route comme un âne chargé dont rient les enfants et qui baisse la tête. Je m'en irai où vous voudrez, quand vous voudrez. L'Angelus sonne."

That may want theological definiteness, and is far removed from the precise ultramontanism of the Preface to *Les Géorgiques Chrétiennes* : "Je ne m'écarterai du plus intran-

sigeant et du plus aimé des dogmes : le dogme catholique romain qui est la Vérité sortie de la bouche même de N.-S. Jésus-Christ par son Église"—but it has no kind of relationship with the gelatinous dubiety of Clough, or the faint trust in the larger hope of *In Memoriam*. Whatever be wanting, certainly faith is not.

Frederic Myers sometimes rose above the desperate doubt of his two verses already quoted, but apart from his two longer poems, *S. Paul* and *S. John the Baptist*, in which we may doubt how far any of the thoughts represent his personal views, perhaps his most definitely Christian poem is the beautiful prayer :

O for one minute hark what we are saying !
This is not pleasure that we ask of Thee !
Nay, let all life be weary with our praying,
Streaming of tears and bending of the knee :—

Only we ask thro' shadows of the valley,
Stay of Thy staff and guiding of Thy rod,
Only when rulers of the darkness rally,
Be Thou beside us, very near, O God.

Moving as this is and fraught for once with intense conviction, it is a solitary mood. Yet on the whole, if one may judge from his poetry, Myers was more Christian by instinct than Clough. In spite of the prevailing scepticism, and his apparent deficiency of devotional *knowledge*, he possessed *flair* which inspired some memorable lines, thoughts and phrases which no scoffer, or materialist or thorough-going sceptic could have conceived or moulded. Such lines (not popular stanzas but swift intuitions) from *S. Paul* as these—

Give the world joy but patience to the saints,
or
God shall forgive thee all but thy despair,
or
Show me, O Love, the wounds which I have made
or
Are there so many purified thro' pain ?—

such lines never came from a pen wholly uninspired by religion. The man who wrote

Watching Thy terrible and fiery finger
Shrivel the falsehood from the souls of men,

possessed something more real than a GOD of Whom he had read, but Whom he had never realised. Yet this element was not strong enough in him to enable him to beat back the withering sterilizing doubt of the last half of the nineteenth century ; that runs all through his characteristic poem *The Implicit Promise of Immortality*, which is avowedly just an individual essay after Truth—

In thine imagined ears I pour again
A faltering message from the man in men.

He draws a vivid, indelible picture of the fine flower of cultured English civilisation—

Take any of the sons our Age has nursed,
Fed with her food and taught her best and worst ;
Suppose no great disaster ; look not nigh
On hidden hours of his extremity ;
But watch him like the flickering magnet stirred
By each imponderable look and word,
And think how firm a courage every day
He needs to bear him on life's common way,
Since even at his best his spirit moves,
Thro' such a tourney of conflicting loves,—
Unwisely sought, untruly called untrue,
Beloved, and hated, and beloved anew ;
Till in the changing whirl of praise and blame
He feels himself the same and not the same,
And often, overworn and overwon,
Knows all a dream and wishes all were done.

Who could dream that this figure so familiar, so common among the educated classes in the seventies and eighties of the last century, belonged to this England with its past great heritage of religious achievement ? There is not so much as a hint even of a Theology tried, found wanting and flung aside ; it is the denuded condition of one growing up,—as if such a thing never had existed and never would exist,—without any systematic religious instruction at all ; and then, being plunged into this trying inhospitable world, seeking to fill the blank with some baseless contrivance of his own. The nakedness of the land appears still more uncompromisingly if we set alongside the portrait Myers drew, such a picture as Francis Thompson could limn, of an Englishman well schooled indeed but naturally not more dowered possibly than many of

whom Myers' lines are so apt a description, the famous apostrophe to Blessed Thomas More—

Ah, happy Fool of Christ, unawed
By familiar sanctities,
You served your Lord at holy ease !
Dear Jester in the Courts of God—
In whose spirit, enchanting yet,
Wisdom and love, together met,
Laughed on each other for content !
That an inward meriment,
An inviolate soul of pleasure,
To your motions taught a measure
All your days.¹

The quality of vague deism pervades many of Matthew Arnold's poems, save when he abandons himself to the still hazier phrases of doubt. He had not lost all hold on something extra-human when he wrote—

Calm soul of all things, make it mine
To feel amid the city's jar
That there abides a peace of time
Man did not make and cannot mar.²

Still, Marcus Aurelius could have said as much as that. But he differs from other poets of his generation. While his personal instinct seems less religious than Myers' in this, that his poetry has no trace of that occasional note of irremediable pain, pain of realised deprivation, which vibrates in Myers' work, and while his scepticism is often as profound as Clough's, he shews more grasp of the meaning and result of historic Christianity to and in other people : e.g. he not only visited La Grande Chartreuse, but he really had some inkling of its true, hidden significance—

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these on earth, I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride,
I come to shed them at their side.³

Moreover, in *Obermann Once More*, he wrote those pain-charged, longing stanzas beginning

Oh, had I lived in that great day.

¹ *Collected Poems of Francis Thompson*, vol. ii., p. 134.

² *Poems of Matthew Arnold*, vol. ii., p. 190.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 190.

Yet, in some fashion not easily explicable in words but not to be avoided in apprehension, Arnold seems to stand outside it all : it is less a present want—

O somewhere, somewhere, God unknown
Exist and be !—

than regret for the waking from an exquisite dream. If only the dream had lasted, Arnold believed himself to be capable of any sacrifice in so enchanted a land—

No cloister floor of humid stone
Had been too cold for me ;
For me no Eastern desert lone
Had been too far to flee.—

but in the cold light of modern London all that was as really empty, as absolutely unreal as the pageant of last night to the sleeper now wide awake—

Now he is dead ! Far hence he lies
In the lone Syrian town ;
And on his grave with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down.

With this greater power of appreciating other men's orthodoxy, Arnold displayed less personal, acute need than Myers when from time to time and very occasionally the real soul within unveiled its bitter emptiness.

It is natural perhaps that the one woman whose poetry betrayed the current doubt should, while evincing an equally obvious lack of theological training, break into a vein of fierce unbelief. If it be true that women are more religious than men—these popular generalisations are not very convincing—it would be reasonable to suppose that their unbelief also would be more radical and therefore more bitter. The poetry of Amy Levy attracted less attention than might have been expected, for it appeared at a moment when there was something like interest shewn in literary work, and it had in it a quality which has not been quite matched by any other English writer. Two slim volumes, less than two hundred pages in all, represent her achievement in verse.

What can exceed in bitterness the grim contrast of the first and last stanzas of *A Dirge* ?—

There's May amid the meadows,
There's May amid the trees ;
Her May-time note the cuckoo
Sends forth upon the breeze.

Of warmth and sun and sweetness
All nature takes a part ;
The ice of all the ages
Weighs down upon my heart.

A soul whose pain was incurable by any ordinary means speaks there. Then her farewell to Cambridge, with its intimate love of that little grey city, has an appeal which no one who knows it can resist ; but saturated with an irredeemable pessimism, a fierceness of bitter sorrow which nothing can heal :—

All they that dwell within thee
To leave thee are ever loth,
For one man gets friends and another,
Gets honour, and one gets both.

The sad rain falls from Heaven ;
My heart is great with woe—
I have neither a friend nor an honour,
Yet I am sorry to go.

This mood of immedicable bitterness, of unreasoning woe, turned later on into an implacable fierceness of denial—

All's done with utterly,
All's done with. Death to me
Was ever death indeed ;
To me no kindly creed
Consolatory was given—

And in *Felo de Se* it changed to a blank misery which was no pose, but a dread, terrible reality—

I have neither a voice nor hands, nor any friend nor a foe,
I am I—just a Pulse of Pain—I am I, that is all I know.
For Life, and the sickness of Life, and Death and desire to die ;—
They have passed away like the smoke : here is nothing but Pain and I.

The concluding lines in this her latest volume, whose proofs

were passed about a week before her death, are tragic in their aptness—

On you the sun is shining free ;
Our Poet sleeps in Italy
Beneath an alien sod ; on me
The Cloud descends.

There, without relief, is the logical issue of the Period's cultivated doubt.

IV. *The Poetry of Faith*

THE poetry of Faith may be described as a current in the broad river, or a golden thread in the many-coloured tapestry of English nineteenth-century poetry.

Mr. Stopford Brooke, in 1876, published a *Primer of English Literature*, which has since gone through large editions. A few "superior" critics, perhaps misapprehending its purpose, affected to despise the book. But teachers and lovers of Literature, who grasped its suggestiveness and stimulus, forgave a not infrequent want of depth, and an occasional lapse in judgment; realising that a book of such wide scope, confined within so small a compass, could not possibly hope for or attain to immunity from such faults. To the people, who knew how to use it, within the limits which its author probably proposed, it has been one of the few books of its sort which they would not willingly have forgone. His criticism of Keble may possibly rank among his errors of judgment. If we are to admit, as he dogmatically declares, that the *Christian Year* really stands "somewhat apart from the main line of English Poetry" then we shall have to ask him whether by this statement he intended to accord to Keble that "individuality" which he conceded in so laudatory a fashion to the Caroline poets, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and Habington. If so, then we may accept his dictum: but if it mean that English poetry could quite well undergo the excision of Keble without suffering loss, then surely he is mistaken, and badly so.

What was the contemporary poetry of the *Christian Year*, the "main line," from which Keble is said to stand apart?

In 1821, Shelley's *Adonais* and *Epipsychidion* were published. In 1830, Tennyson's slender sheaf of fifty-six poems appeared, of which the *Ode to Memory* and the *Dying Swan*

gave not only a foretaste of the future, but were destined to become an imperishable part of his enduring work. In 1831, Browning's *Pauline* was issued semi-privately. Near the middle of the period came Keble's *Christian Year*, viz. in 1827.

One point which is not always remembered, is that it was written and published six years before the Tractarian Movement began at Oxford, the birthday of that being, as Newman always held, July 14th, 1833, when Keble preached his famous Assize Sermon at Oxford on *National Apostasy*. The *Christian Year* is, *pace* Mr. Stopford Brooke, a milestone on a well-worn road. In a foreword to a new edition of Bishop Challoner's *Meditations*,¹ Lord Halifax wrote: "They are admirable also for the careful doctrinal statements which they contain. No one, I think, can use them without being reminded of much with which he is already familiar in the language of the Prayer-book, in many of the older books of devotion put out by the Caroline Divines, and, to come to later times, the whole spirit which animates Mr. Keble's Parochial Sermons." Moreover, it may certainly be claimed that the *Christian Year* is not an isolated work: its standpoint and ethos are identical with that of his Sermons, and his great treatise on *Eucharistical Adoration*, for Keble's attitude was homogeneous throughout. It has been often mistakenly fancied that in writing the *Christian Year*, he was merely composing devotional poems to expound and summarise the inner meaning of some fasts and feasts of the Church. As a matter of fact, he combined to a considerable degree the elements of doctrinal theology, of religion, of art and of poetry. One single instance in proof of this may be cited. For the hundreds who have loved Wordsworth's well-known sonnet on the Inside of King's College Chapel, there may have been thousands who have missed this combination of elements in two verses of Keble's poem for the third Sunday after Epiphany. He is writing of the Cathedral Builders, of that Thirteenth Century which Creighton declared to be the greatest of all centuries, of those generally anonymous artists, who have left England and France so rich a legacy—

¹ Published by the Society of SS. Peter and Paul, in November, 1915.

Till out of dust his magic raise
A home for prayer and love and full harmonious praise,

Where far away and high above,
In maze on maze the trancèd sight
Strays, mindful of that heavenly love
Which knows no end in depth or height.

Though it is far less daring in expression, this does not differ in spirit from the closing lines of Verlaine's sonnet—

Haute théologie et solide morale,
Guidé par la folie unique de la Croix
Sur tes ailes de pierre, ô folle Cathédrale—

the latter at least surely reminiscent of the dreaming, tenuous Choir of S. Pierre at Beauvais; for vital to perfection of beauty as the Gothic Cathedrals' glass is, and irrevocable their loss when it is wanting, yet Paul Claudel seized on the truth already perceived by Keble and Verlaine, when he put into the mouth of Pierre de Craonne those illumined words—

Mais avant le verre, l'architecte par la disposition qu'il sait
Construit l'appareil de pierre comme une filtre
dans les eaux de la Lumière de Dieu,
Et donne à toute l'édifice son orient comme à une perle.¹

"Mediævalist" is a term cast often in scorn at those, who still care for all the skill, devotion and insight which made the Ages of Faith all which they were, and enabled them to do all which they did. Keble would not have winced: he at any rate knew the real value of

le Moyen Age énorme et délicat.

All the while he could also appreciate the world's physical beauty: his love of Nature was as real, as observant, as that of any member of the "Natural School."

The morning mist is cleared away,
Yet still the face of heaven is grey,
Nor yet th' autumnal breeze has stirr'd the grove,
Faded yet full, a paler green
Skirts soberly the tranquil scene,
The red-breast warbles round this leafy cove—²

there is a picture which none but a real "countryman" would have seen: the perception is equal to Wordsworth's, the

¹ *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, Prologue, p. 35.

² *Christian Year*: Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

delicate, wistful colouring is worthy of Collins. The three first stanzas of the poem immediately preceding this have caught marvellously the peculiar charm of north-country spacious solitude among the fells. Once more, the poem for the Third Sunday in Advent is composed of a succession of delicately differentiated pictures, of which one, the seventh, would not seem strange on a page of Henry Vaughan—

Or choose thee out a cell
In Kedron's storied dell,
Beside the springs of love that never die ;
 Among the olives kneel
The chill night blast to feel,
And watch the moon that saw thy Master's agony.

Keble was essentially a seer, he had that peculiar quality of vision which Shelley claimed as the very essence of the poet's power. The man who could write—

O for a sculptor's hand,
That thou mightst take thy stand,
Thy wild hair floating on the eastern breeze,
Thy tranced yet open gaze
Fixed on the desert haze,
As one who deep in heaven some airy pageant sees.

In outline dim and vast
Their fearful shadows cast
The giant forms of empires on their way
To ruin : one by one
They tower and they are gone,
Yet in the prophet's soul the dreams of avarice stay,¹

was at once a poet and a man of faith.

While Keble's name will more likely keep a place in popular memory through the *Christian Year* than through either the *Academical Sermons* or the treatise on *Eucharistical Adoration*, Newman, quite apart from his ecclesiastical position, owes literary fame rather to the *Apologia*, than to his verse, even including *Gerontius*, while the most original of all his writings, *The Grammar of Assent*, seems now to be relegated to theologians and professional students of philosophy.

Yet, the collected edition of his poetry, published in 1868, and dedicated to Edward Badeley (one of his Counsel in the Achilli case) was, on its appearance, acclaimed : the *Spectator*, whose *flair* under the editorship of Mr. Hutton, was sound,

¹ "Second Sunday after Easter."

greeted the book with praise. To Mr. Hutton, Newman wrote: "If I had my way I should give myself up to verse-making; it is nearly the only kind of composition which is not a trouble to me, but I have never had time."

The *Christian Year* was the work of a devotional poet: Newman too had poetic capacity and rare devotion, nevertheless his poetry is primarily the revelation of a personality. The whole spirit of the *Christian Year* breathes steady faith, irrevocable devotion, piety of a singular calm. There are stress, strain, baffled desire, speculation,

a battle to fight ere the guerdon be gained
The reward of it all,

all those, in this thin volume which contains all the poetry for which the great Cardinal found time.

O what a shifting parti-coloured scene
Of hope and fear, of triumph and dismay,
Of recklessness and penitence, has been
The history of that dreary, lifelong fray—

save for the recklessness, never a characteristic of Newman, he might have made Gerontius's words his own.

Far less popular than Keble's, it is perhaps more intimately human. Though, as already has been claimed, Keble's *Christian Year* is not merely a series of poems on the Church's Feasts and Fasts, its set object still was to bring people's "thoughts and feelings into more entire unison with those recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book." At the end of the preface, Keble goes a little further in expounding his motives when he writes of "that soothing tendency in the Prayer Book, which it is the chief purpose of these pages to exhibit." Whatever Newman and his works were or were not, "soothing" is not the adjective which is applicable to them. His poems shew that intense self-awareness and self-criticism which make Mr. Wilfrid Ward's "Life" of him such painful reading at times; a sensitiveness which was temperamental, however much or little the many struggles and some disappointments of his life may have sharpened it.

Thus in 1833, when he was only thirty-two years old, he composed the following lines as the ship was off Sardinia—

Each trial has its weight, which whoso bears
 Knows his own woe, and need of succouring grace ;
 The martyr's hope half wipes away the trace
 Of flowing blood ; the while life's humblest cares
 Smart more because they hold in Holy Writ no place.

This be my comfort, in these days of grief,
 Which is not Christ's, nor forms heroic tale.
 Apart from Him, if not a sparrow fail,
 May He not pitying view, and send relief
 When foes or friends perplex, and peevish thoughts prevail ?

Written five days later than the world-renowned "Lead, kindly Light," it is far more intimately personal to Newman, as he shewed himself through his long, arduous life, than the more beautiful poem. It is well known that Newman, being asked, confessed that he was not quite sure of his meaning in the latter : but at any time in his life, he knew only too well the significance of this most moving poem on vexations, those things too small to merit any promise of help, too petty for their conquest to amount to a triumph, too shameful for most of us to be candid enough to avow them,

When foes or friends perplex, and peevish thoughts prevail.

But if such self-revelation were painful to those admirers of Newman who tried to canonise him during his life-time,¹ it is proof at the same time of faith, of profoundly personal faith, which was no growth of a religious system quietly and easily accepted, but was forged in battle—not always great battles as men reckon issues, but in perpetual fighting against small but none the less deadly faults. There is in Newman's poems a note of painful, smarting conflict, which is absent from Keble's, a note too of the *costliness* of it all—

Hid are the Saints of God.

These are the chosen few,
 The remnant fruit of widely-scattered grace,
 GOD sows in waste, to reap whom He foreknew
 Of man's cold race ;
 Counting on wills perverse, in His clear view
 Of boundless time and space,
 He waits, by scant return for treasures given
 To fill the thrones of heaven.²

¹ *Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, by W. Ward, vol. i., pp. 229, 230.

² *The Hidden Ones*.

The modern way, when difficulties baffle, is to arraign GOD at the bar of mortal man : Newman chose the safer path of self-condemnation and confession of personal failure.

No one could accuse the Tractarians of under-rating evil, and Keble over and over again dwells on sin and its consequences ; indeed the present-day lightheartedness about it had not sprung up in the forties and fifties of the last century. Yet in this Newman stands alone, there is in his verse an intensity of self-condemnation, a haunting sense of unpardonable unworthiness. Thus in 1849, writing on Candle-mass, he confessed—

And while the sword in Mary's soul
Is driven home, we hide
In our own hearts, and count the wounds
Of passion and of pride.

Not seldom others disappointed him, yet in his most sensitive moments he never failed to realise that he himself was "an unprofitable servant" : the two moods being easily compatible. There is almost an agony of thankfulness in his recollection that the Divine Pity will indeed not quench the smoking flax—

The Sinless One, He comes to seek,
The dreary heart, the spirit lone,
Tender of natures, proud or weak
Not less than if they were His own.

He takes and scans the sinner o'er,
Handling His scholars, one by one,
Weighing what they can bear before
He gives the penance to be done.¹

There is an aching remorse over the infinite pettiness of his sins, most bitter experience of the temperamentally irritable—

I'm ashamed of myself, of my tears and my tongue,
So easily fretted, so often unstrung ;
Mad at trifles, to which a chance moment gives birth,
Complaining of heaven and complaining of earth.²

Here is nothing of the "soothing tendency" of which Keble wrote, nothing either of the intellectual assurance which was building up English Utilitarianism, nor trace of the stripped

¹ *S. Philip to his God*, 1850.

² *S. Philip in his Disciples*, 1857.

misery of those who had lost their Faith and found the world empty : it belongs to Newman equally in his Anglican and Roman Catholic days. With him, Faith was intuitive : *anima naturaliter christiana*, he found in the depth and unshakable reality of his Faith the only salve for the soreness, the smarts of daily life. Whatever its literary value, and that has ever been rated highly by competent critics, Newman's was a Poetry of Faith. As pure literature, it had nothing to fear from comparison with his contemporaries. One would return to Pascal rather than turn to any Victorian to find a parallel for—

O man, strange composite of heaven and earth !
Majesty dwarfed to baseness ! fragrant flower
Running to poisonous seed ! and seeming worth
Cloking corruption ! weakness mastering power !
Who never art so near to crime and shame,
As when thou hast achieved some deed of name,¹

while amidst all the love of Nature which Tennyson's rare and appreciative soul quickened in his countrymen, Newman's lines possess a special element when he compares the approach of the coming of the Presence of God to the passing soul, to the incomparable music of the wind in pines—

The sound is like the rushing of the wind—
The summer wind—among the lofty pines,
Swelling and dying, echoing round about,
Now here, now distant, wild and beautiful ;
While scattered from the branches it has stirred
Descend ecstatic odours.²

When the world has gone some centuries on its further road, and men think of the nineteenth century in the historical fashion in which we now perforce must treat the Middle Ages, it is possible that their main feeling will be that beyond all others it was an era of contradictions and differences. The utilitarians and rationalists generally grew up alongside of the Catholic party in the English Church, alongside the steady recuperation and extension of Roman Catholic power and belief : the Physical Science School fought for existence and rose gradually to a commanding position : Capitalism entrenched itself in huge "Trusts" : Labour

¹ *Dream of Gerontius*.

² *Ibid.*

organised itself into formidable societies : political parties grew, multiplied and changed with kaleidoscopic and bewildering swiftness : women awoke to previously undreamed-of possibilities : schools of literature and art rose, flourished and waned : every conceivable and inconceivable crank and fad bloomed and bore its sickly fruit, of whose bitter taste we are yet not wholly rid. It will be reckoned, by the Future, surely, as an age of ability, of unrest, of endless and diverse experiment. And the Poetry of Faith reflects something of this infinite variety. As Newman differs *toto cælo* from Keble, so do the Rossettis, brother and sister, from him.

The fluent facility of Christina Rossetti was perhaps her bane : few writers would gain more from a drastic winnowing. It is difficult, for example, to understand why, when she must surely have been conversant with her brother's great sonnet

The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they, could I see them on the street
Lie as they fell ?—

she should have thought it worth while to fumble round much the same idea, in the trio of sonnets " If thou sayest, Behold we knew it not ; " it is inexplicable. It is not less difficult to discern why the writer of *Behold the Man* should have published poems of so little distinctiveness as the sonnets called *Later Life*, of which perhaps the eleventh is the least commendable.

If any one will realise the failure of her rendering of the *Omnia Opera*, it is but necessary to compare these tame and wordy stanzas—

We Star-hosts, numerous and innumeros,
Throng space with energy tumultuous,
And work His will Whose eye beholdeth us.

To-day I praise God with a sparkling face,
My thousand thousand waves all uttering praise,
To-morrow I commit me to His grace,—

with Paul Fort's magnificent apostrophe—

Rien de mortel peut-il, Mer, te donner à vivre, calmer la soif
de ciel dont tes miroirs sont ivres ? N'est-ce pas l'Autre Monde
qu'il te faut réfléchir quand tu veux apaiser tes miroirs bondissants ?
Ce n'est qu'au bord du ciel que s'usent les tempêtes dressées
comme l'Espoir dans l'azur frémissant ; c'est partie vers la nue
aux appels des planètes, que tu rêves d'amour en les réfléchissant.

Dans les hautes marées montez, flots éternels, montez éperdu-
ment jusqu'aux espaces pâles où la mer du Chaos, sur les plages du
ciel a déposé le sel infini des étoiles.¹

Inferior from the point of view of real religious fervour, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work surpasses his sister's from the purely literary standpoint. There is, for instance, in the *Blessed Damosel* no indication of the writer's acceptance of the Catholic Faith, it could quite well issue from the dramatic and artistic senses combined with external knowledge of what others believe. For music, for pictorial beauty, for human feeling, it will ever remain a treasure : but it has none of Newman's intensity of conviction, nothing even of the speculative yearning or unquenchable longings of the Poets of Doubt.

A not dissimilar difference may be traced between the attitude of Christina Rossetti and W. B. Yeats—still more of A. E. and Joseph Campbell—to the Supernatural. A comparison of *Goblin Market* and the *Countess Cathleen* will reveal irrevocably the fundamental divergence between a literary taste for Fairy Tales, and a racial instinct for the spirit world. The general atmosphere of A. E. and Mr. Campbell indicates the difference still more unmistakably. Still, in greater or less degree, the two Rossettis have their niche in the house of the Poetry of Faith, as it evolved and elaborated itself during the shifting nineteenth century.

Of a totally different calibre was their co-temporary, the lone, distinctive poet, Coventry Patmore ; the originality of whose work has surely been underrated.

It is not easy to believe nor necessary to hope that future generations will read thoroughly and carefully, *The Angel in the House* or *The Victories of Love*. The student of Literature of course will, but most, even lovers of Poetry, will probably rest content with the verdict of Patmore's latest editor : " It is evident too that from the time of his earliest experience the mystic intuition which ultimately led him to associate, almost to identify, human love with Love Divine had not been altogether absent. Though to the casual reader there will appear to be as great a gulf in thought as in form

¹ *Hymne à la Mer*, Paul Fort, vol. xiv.

between the 'Angel' and the 'Odes,' no one will have understood the inner meaning of the former, who has failed to find in it the same essential idea which is more fully and more exclusively conveyed in the latter. In both is intimated that root-idea of his philosophy of love, that passion and purity are in direct, not in inverse, ratio, one to the other, an apprehension which justified to him a complete freedom in the use of his favourite analogy."¹

But there is no other poetry in our language which could fill the gap, were *The Unknown Eros*, by any mishap, lost.

It was begun in one of the most beautiful spots in the country. In 1886, the poet bought a small estate lying on the west of the high road from Tunbridge Wells to Uckfield, considerably nearer to the latter. Perched on a little ridge, Heron's Ghyll, as he happily named it, lay on the edge of Ashdown Forest, a wide-stretching, undulating, woodland region, its heights crowned with circles of pines, its valleys clothed with woods of pine and beech and silver birch; alive not only to the senses, but to the receptive soul. The third ode, *Winter*, in *The Unknown Eros*, must owe its peculiar charm to the inspiration of that enchanted place:—

I, singularly moved
To love the lovely that are not beloved,

Of all the seasons, most
Love Winter, and to trace
The sense of the Trophonian pallor on her face.
It is not death but plentitude of peace.

The gorse-field dark, by sudden gold caprice,
Turns here and there into a Jason's fleece.

And the flush'd Robin, in the evenings hoar,
Does of Love's Day, as if he saw it, sing;
But sweeter yet than dream or song of Summer or of Spring
Are Winter's sometimes smiles, that seem to well
From infancy ineffable.

The brooding solitude of Northumbria, or the lonely spaces of Yorkshire are vaster, no doubt, than the forest land of Sussex, and have their own incomparable exhilaration: but to the Sussex-born there is an indescribable and intimate

¹ *Coventry Patmore's Poems*, edited by Basil Champneys, p. xxxii.

peace on the Downs and among the hills and valleys of the "Forest," not to be found elsewhere: and this, Patmore, though not native, only a passing visitor, felt, appreciated, captured. It is but an added proof of that rare intuition which made him one of the truest mystics—to use an often abused word—among our country's poets.

A "seer" in actual fact was Patmore. Sometimes, as in the poem called *Winter*, he sees the inner reality under Nature's exterior: at others, as in *Let Be*, he pierces to the inside truth of human things—

not all height is holiness
Nor every sweetness good,
And grace will sometimes lurk where who could guess?

In the sixties and seventies, when thinkers and controversialists filled the air with their doubts, contentions and speculations, when book after book issued from the Press carrying the intended death-warrant of the ancient Faith, Patmore's intuitive conviction steals on the ear—

what we have to gain
Is not one battle, but a weary life's campaign.

Yea, though I sin each day times seven,
And dare not lift the fearfullest eyes to Heaven,
Thanks must I give
Because that seven times are not eight or nine,
And that my darkness is all mine,
And that I live
Within this oak-shade one more minute even,
Hearing the winds their Maker magnify.

"The Great Companion" was not "dead," could not be to this poet alone in the forest's peace, attentive when

the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord.

In the seventies, when Rationalism seemed about to score a sweeping victory, Patmore flung magnificently into the troubled arena this ringing challenge—

O, foolish Man, meeting things low and high,
By self, that accidental quantity!
With this conceit, Philosophy stalks frail
As peacock staggering underneath his tail.
Who judge of Plays by their own puny gaff,
At God's great theatre will hiss and laugh;
For what's a saint to them
Brought up in modern virtues brummagem?

Rationalism has shewn so thoroughly its bankrupt inability to redeem every call made upon it, that now, people sometimes forget the overweening arrogance of its former claims. Writing of "philosophic Radicalism," J. S. Mill observed: "So complete was my Father's reliance on the influence of reason over the minds of mankind, whenever it is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word and in writing, and if by means of the suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they adopted."¹ After something like half a century of these blessings, one must fall back on the Socratic irony—"Happy is Evenus, said I, if he really have this wisdom, and sells it at such a modest price." As a matter of fact, it is still true of Wisdom that

Man knoweth not the price thereof.

But Coventry Patmore had at least that beginning of wisdom which realises that the Finite is not and cannot be the inch-measure of Infinity. Nor was Rationalism the only bubble he pricked. To a generation which had proclaimed its allegiance to Hedonism, which made pleasure and pain the test of right and wrong, he expounded afresh the old mystery of sacrificial love, at first in a tentative couplet—

Sadness is beauty's savour, and pain is
The exceedingly keen edge of bliss.²

And then with elaborate analysis—

O, Pain, Love's mystery,
Close next of kin
To joy and heart's delight,
Low pleasure's opposite,
Choice food of sanctity.
And medicine of sin,
Angel, whom even they that will pursue
Pleasure with hell's whole gust
Find that they must
Perversely woo,
My lips, thy live coal touching, speak thee true.
Thou sear'st my flesh, O Pain,
And brand'st for arduous peace my languid brain,
And bright'nest my dull view,
Till I, for blessing, blessing give again,

¹ *Autobiography of J. S. Mill*, p. 106.

² *The Unknown Eros*, Bk. II, xiii.

And my roused spirit is
 Another fire of bliss,
 Wherein I learn
 Feelingly how the pangful, purging fire
 Shall furiously burn
 With joy, not only of assured desire,
 But also present joy
 Of seeing the life's corruption, stain by stain,
 Vanish in the clear heat of love irate,
 And fume by fume, the sick alloy
 Of luxury, sloth and hate
 Evaporate :
 Leaving the man, so dark awhile,
 The mirror merely of God's smile.¹

Here is the creed of all mystics, first, last and all down their
 great line, core as it is of Christianity,—

Not by prayers, not by songs
 Are men reborn,
 But by sacrifice.
 Sacrifice is the revealer :
 We see all things clearly
 In the glazed mirror of blood.²

It is indeed curiously interesting, in the second half of the
 nineteenth century which salved its sores with Tennyson's
 faint trust of the larger hope, or sought some element of
 bracing strength in Browning's temperamental robustness, or
 plunged in doubt with Clough, or cried aloud in despair with
 Myers, suddenly to meet Patmore's illumined joy—

What rumoured heavens are these
 Which not a poet sings,
 O, unknown Eros ? What this breeze
 Of sudden wings
 Speeding at far return of time from interstellar space
 To fan my very face,
 And gone as fleet
 Through delicatest ether feathering soft their solitary beat,

With ne'er a light plume dropped, nor any trace
 To speak of whence they came, or whither they depart,—

a joy all the keener for that intense sensitiveness to the other
 possibilities of life, that mood in him, which could

mark

The life that haunts the emptiness
 And horror of the dark.

Not less striking is the contrast between the poems of Amy

¹ *The Unknown Eros*, Bk. II, xv.

² *Earth of Cualann*, Joseph Campbell, Dublin, 1917.

Levy and Mrs. Meynell, so many of them contemporary, yet in spirit wider than the poles asunder. The former published a small volume of verse now out of print, in Cambridge, in 1881; *A Minor Poet* in 1884; and *A London Plane Tree* in 1889. Mrs. Meynell's first volume appeared in 1875; *Preludes*, the second, in 1893; and *Later Poems* in 1901. Finally *Collected Poems* were published in 1913. Setting aside those belonging to the new century, the others, if compared with the two extant volumes of Amy Levy, afford one of the most curious contrasts which could be found, a contrast which does not wholly exclude likeness. For instance, if they were all presented anonymously to some competent critic unacquainted with any of them, could such be found, he would assuredly attribute them to women. Again, both are sensitive to colour, sounds, changes of all sorts, in the physical world and in human moods: both are careful of subtle differences and of details generally called small. The fundamental distinction, which nothing can bridge, is just the chasm which yawns between faith and doubt, and the mental, moral and spiritual attitude sequent on these. Comparison is only possible in some cases: there is nothing in Amy Levy's volumes which can be ranged alongside of *The Young Neophyte*, and *Renouncement*, *To a Daisy*, or *San Lorenzo's Mother*; nothing comparable to the exquisite *Advent Meditation*. But *An Unmarked Festival*¹ is actually upon the same incident as *To Lallie*.² Could two poems be more fundamentally and entirely divergent in outlook and feeling? Again, it might be urged that both were lovers of London. But what a contrast. The two poems which are least widely sundered are *A Dead Harvest*,³ where Mrs. Meynell for once omits the note of hope, and *Straw in the Street*⁴ with its pathetic clutch at a bare chance: but what worlds apart are those other two, the grim *Ballade of a Special Edition*⁵ and the illumined vision *November Blue*.⁶ Perhaps no two poems which could be compared shew the divergence between the poetry of Faith and Doubt more lucidly than this pair. If the subject be human love, then

¹ *Poems* (1913 ed.), p. 17.

² *Poems*, p. 73.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ *A Minor Poet*, p. 80.

⁵ *A London Plane Tree*, p. 25.

⁶ *Poems*, p. 73.

June¹ may be contrasted with *Regrets*²; if the loveliness and solace of Nature, then, rather more akin, and yet really far away, *The Birch Tree at Loschwitz*³ and *In Autumn*.⁴

As the century went on, and drew into its last decades, two poets sang of faith, religion and even of theology, Lionel Johnson and Francis Thompson. Their work was not, like Newman's, the fruit of stolen leisure, but their life's task.

Does the long sequent glory of English verse afford a more marvellous combination of classic purity, profound faith and sheer beauty than Johnson's apostrophe to sorrow, *Before the Cloister*—

Lady of grey, wise hours ! come back to me :
 Voice of the sighing sea,
 Voice of the ancient wind, infinite voice !
 Thine austere chants rejoice
 Mine heart, thine anthems cool me : I grow strong,
 Drinking thy bitter song,
 Rich with true tears and medicinal dews,
 O thou Uranian Muse !
 Come, vestal Lady ! in my vain heart light
 The flame, divinely white !
 Come Lady of the Lilies, blanch to snow
 My soul through sacred woe !
 Come thou through whom I hold in memory
 Moonlit Gethsemani :
 Come, make a vesper silence round my ways,
 And mortify my days :
 O, Sorrow ! come through whom alone I keep
 Safe from the fatal sleep.⁵

A wonderful poem to spring out of the heart of a materialistic age, bent on cheating pain and defeating grief. Not less remarkable, but this time as a poem of Nature, is *Bagley Wood*.⁶ As a further study in contrast of poetry of religious faith and of doubt or nescience, it would be profitable to compare this with William Watson's strikingly beautiful *Night on Curbar Edge*, which beside Johnson's will be found to fall short just by an element of spiritual emptiness.

It is in no mood of ingratitude to some members of the "Celtic School," if it be suggested that Lionel Johnson's great poem *Ireland* supplies something which is occasionally wanting

¹ *A London Plane Tree*, p. 46.

² *Poems* (1913 ed.), p. 28.

³ *A London Plane Tree*, p. 40.

⁴ *Poems*, p. 19.

⁵ *Poetical Works of Lionel Johnson*, p. 226.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

in their poems, viz. the fact that Ireland is peopled by a race not only intensely aware of the supernatural environment of human life, but of the specifically Christian supernatural sphere of being. To him, Ireland is a land of spirits, but also the Island of the Saints—

And yet great spirits ride thy winds : thy ways
Are haunted and enchanted evermore.
Thy children hear the voices of old days
In music of thy sea upon the shore,
In falling of the waters from thine hills,
In whispers of thy trees :
A glory from the things eternal fills
Their eyes, and at high noon thy people sees
Visions, and wonderful is all the air.
So upon earth they share
Eternity ; they learn it at thy knees.¹

Like Ernest Dowson, Johnson was a lover of France—

Hark ! on the fragrant air
Music of France, voices of France, fall piercing fair :
Poor France, where Mary's star shines, lest her children drown :—

but of the two poets, it was the genius of Dowson which was the nearer to the French spirit.

A curiously interesting pair of poems for comparison and contrast are Johnson's *To a Passionist* and Dowson's *Carthusians*. It is to be noted that it is Dowson who—however much greater his life's irregularities might be—seems to grasp most sympathetically the real meaning and ethos of wholesale self-surrender. For all that, no poet of the nineteenth century was more definitely religious than Johnson. In the whole of his poems, written at intervals between 1884 and 1897, there are none without a spiritual, and very few without a theological atmosphere. The Faith of Christendom is everywhere on his pages.

Yet it was left for Francis Thompson to drive deep into the consciousness of a generation, largely materialistic, the true force and meaning of the Poetry of Faith. It is not too much to say that to more than a few people *The Hound of Heaven* was not far removed from a revelation. It has been claimed not only as one of the greatest, but also as one of the most individual of English odes. Thompson is singular in another

¹ *Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson*, p. 142

respect : he is the only one of our poets who is steeped in and saturated with liturgical splendour ; one large section of his poetry represents as no other English verse, not even Crashaw's, does, the embroidered pageantry of Catholicism, its external pomp, its gorgeous apparel, its lights, its emblems, its wreathed and mounting incense. His thought is vested in all the glory and colour of ecclesiastical ceremonial. His diction moves with measured processional step, hued and heavy with symbolical trappings : wrapping it on all sides is the sacramental atmosphere : the supernatural is his subject-matter, and everywhere it is clad in a vesture stiff with ornament, adorned with rare and curious handiwork, reminiscent of the Sanctuary, like some incomparably wrought cope or chasuble or dalmatic.

It is no mere matter of Faith ; other English poets have shared his Faith, but not his speech, his bearing, nor his precise angle of perception. He is *par excellence* the Liturgist among English-writing poets. This is evident in the *Assumpta Maria*, "vamped up" as he himself announced from the Little Offices of our Lady. We can see it less obviously, but still really in the magnificent *Ode to the Setting Sun*—

No rift disturbs the heavy shade and still,
 Save one, where the charred firmament lets through
 The searching dazzle of heaven ; 'gainst which the hill,
 Out-flattened sombrely,
 Stands black as life against eternity.
 Against eternity ?
 A rifting light in me
 Burns through the leaden broodings of the mind :
 O blessed Sun, thy state
 Uprisen or derogate,
 Dafts me no more with doubt ; I seek and find.

If with exultant tread
 Thou foot the Eastern Sea,
 Or like a golden bee
 Sting the West to angry red,
 Thou dost image, thou dost follow
 That king-maker of Creation,
 Who, ere Hellas hailed Apollo,
 Gave thee, angel-god, thy station ;
 Thou art of Him a type memorial.
 Like Him thou hang'st in dreadful pomp of blood
 Upon thy Western Rood ;

And His stained brow did veil like thine to night,
 Yet lift once more Its light,
 And, risen, again departed from our ball,
 But when it set on earth arose in Heaven.
 Thus hath He unto death His beauty given :
 And so of all which form inheriteth
 The fall doth pass the rise in worth ;
 For birth hath in itself the germ of death,
 But death hath in itself the germ of birth.

If any one wish to see Thompson's liturgical genius, no clearer instance can be found than the following passage from *The Orient Ode*, where those acquainted with the Rite of Benediction will observe how aptly he has used its ritual to describe the pageant of the setting sun—

Lo, in the sanctuaried East,
 Day, a dedicated priest
 In all his robes pontifical exprest,
 Lifteth slowly, lifteth sweetly,
 From out its Orient tabernacle drawn,
 Yon orbèd sacrament confest
 Which sprinkles benediction through the dawn :
 And when the grave procession's ceased,
 The earth with due illustrious rite
 Blessed,—ere the frail fingers featly
 Of twilight, violet-cassocked acolyte,
 His sacerdotal stoles unvest—
 Sets, for high close of the mysterious feast,
 The sun in august exposition meetly
 Within the flaming monstrance of the West.

O salutaris hostia.

Quæ cæli pandis ostium !

Through breachèd darkness' rampart, a
 Divine assaulter, art thou come !

But however magnificent this may be, it is *The Dread of Height* which unfolds his most intimate religious secrets : that, *The Hound of Heaven*, and the *Dead Cardinal of Westminster* forming a kind of Trilogy of self-revealing.

Nowadays, with that convenient forgetfulness which leaves on one side all troublesome and unmalleable evidence, many persons attempt to reduce Christian teaching to an amiable flood of indefinite urbanity, in word if not always in deed. Setting aside all the warnings and denunciations of the Gospels, they proclaim the impossibility, the unthinkable-ness of Divine punishment. Not so Thompson, who knew too well human addiction to sin ; who insisted on man's obligation to repent, openly, avowedly and to some purpose. In an

agony of apprehension, he confesses the likelihood that eventually he may find himself

Thrust down by how much I aspire.

Then follow the lines so laden with awe—

These tidings from the vast to bring
Needeth not doctor nor divine,
Too well, too well
My flesh doth know the heart-perturbing thing :
That dread theology alone
Is mine,
Most native and my own—

a mood not transitory nor fortuitous, for, as he wrote to Mrs. Meynell, à propos of the *Dead Cardinal*, "you know that I believe in eternal punishment : you know that when my dark hour is upon me this individual terror is the most monstrous of all that haunt me. But it is individual."¹

Readers of Newman's poetry may compare with interest his lines on *The Wrath to Come*. In his youth, unlike Thompson, Newman recoiled from the doctrine of punishment, yet he admits—

I found
Christ on Himself, considerate Master, took
The uttermost of that doctrine's dreadful sound.
The Fount of Love His servants sends to tell
Love's deeds : Himself reveals the sinner's hell.

Twenty years later, in his poignant poem to his Guardian Angel, Newman refers again to this—

My oldest friend, mine from the hour
When first I drew my breath

Mine, when I stand before the Judge ;
And mine if spared to stay
Within the golden furnace, till
My sin is burned away.

For the mystical side of Thompson, we must go to *The Mistress of Vision*, unique in our literature. Few tasks are more difficult than to state succinctly the true meaning of the loosely-used term Mysticism. Traditionally, it signifies immediate knowledge of GOD and of divine mysteries and truths, as contrasted with hearsay information. One brief,

¹ *Life of Francis Thompson*, by E. Meynell, p. 226.

inspired passage from Thompson's prose contains the heart of the matter:—"Saintship is the touch of God. To most, even good people, GOD is a belief. To the Saints He is an embrace. They have felt the wind of His locks. His Heart has beaten against their side. They do not believe in Him, for they know Him."¹ Finally, for that vein of his Faith which enabled him to triumph over all the rough and bitter things in life,—and to whom have they proved rougher or bitterer?—we shall turn to *Laus Amara Doloris*, where, reminding us of Coventry Patmore his fellow craftsman, he apostrophises Pain in these illumined words—

O great Key-bearer and Keeper
Of the treasures of God !—

nor must the great *Ode to the English Martyrs* be forgotten, with its daring and apt address to Blessed Thomas More—

Ah, happy Fool of Christ, unawed
By familiar sanctities,
You served your Lord at holy ease !
Dear Jester in the Courts of God.

The modern world, priding and boasting itself in that very modernity, has many a toilsome league to traverse or ever it can regain this "gaiety of the Saints." Its first step must be to abate and alter its present mental attitude, for certainly nothing issues more clearly from a consideration of the Poetry of Doubt and of Faith, during the last century, than that the former relied on Understanding alone, while the latter is shot all through with, interpenetrated by and bathed in the illustrious light of the supernatural, which to the poets of Faith is no outcome of intellectual process, but has all the irrevocable reality of an immediate conviction. That is a fundamental difference which no argument can destroy, nor invertebrate compromise compose.

¹ *Sanctity and Song*, Collected Works, vol. iii., p. 90.

V. "The Nineties"

THE view has been propounded not infrequently that the closing decades of the various centuries included in that vaguely designated period "modern days," have been, so far as poetry is concerned, times of decline and impotence. It may be true in some cases in England since—shall I say the fourteenth century, for I am not quite clear when "modern days" began, nor have I ever been fortunate enough to chance upon any one else who was.

The proposition applied to the eighteenth century is manifestly false. The years 1790-1800 were rendered remarkable by some of the writings of Coleridge (not however *Christabel* nor *Kubla Khan*), by the early poems of Wordsworth including *Tintern Abbey*, by Lamb's poems and by some of Campbell and Southey. With the exception of the first two who had in this period achieved distinction, the decade for the most part represented years of rich promise, redeemed in full by a band of poets in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. There was nothing about them of decline and impotence, they were years of sowing rather. It is surprising that the corresponding period of the nineteenth century has been singled out by some critics for peculiar and unmeasured contempt. There are circles where "the nineties" appear to be, so far as poetry goes, the synonym for worthlessness and even worse. Mr. Ezra Pound is one of the protagonists of this theory, perhaps. At any rate, he is exceedingly vehement in his preface to the *Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson*: "for Milton and Victorianism and for the softness of the nineties, I have different degrees of antipathy and even contempt."¹ So he declares. Yet a good many of Johnson's own poems bear a date in this despised time; and even the

¹ *Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson*, p. vi.

"different degrees" hardly seem to some of us to justify such an odd, uncritical juxtaposition of dissimilars. Again he wrote: "The 'nineties' have chiefly gone out because of their muzziness, because of a softness, derived, I think, not from books but from impressionist painting. They riot with half-decayed fruit." Once more, in his article in the *Fortnightly Review* for December, 1915, on Remy de Gourmont, he wrote this sentence: "We have suffered a period in which the glorification of stupidity, and the worship of unintellectual 'messy' energy have been too much encouraged." Whether this dictum applies to "the Nineties," or to those later writers whom he curtly dismisses as "Fabians, Webbists, Shavians (all of whom, along with all dealers in abstractions, are ultimately futile)," does not escape; for though, no doubt, Mr. Pound tries to put de Gourmont's recipe—"franchement d'écrire ce qu'on pense, seul plaisir d'un écrivain"—into practice, he does not always succeed, and if he be not "messy," whatever that may mean, he certainly can be indefinite in statement.

To these vague charges about "muzziness," "riots of half-decayed fruit" (though how they would set about rioting one hardly sees) and "messiness," etc., I will oppose this plain proposition that to the years between 1890 and 1900 poets of shining merit and widely varying capacity sang, and that any lack which existed, was to be found not in the writers, but in public taste and appreciation. I said so unhesitatingly as we were passing through that decade; I endured cheerfully the gibes of those whose rebukes concerning the purchase of "minor poets" were severe, reproaches of people who now perhaps would gladly possess that original square brown volume of Francis Thompson, or the First Editions of Lord de Tabley. But these are not so easy to obtain nowadays. Equally unhesitatingly, now that more than another decade and a half has passed, I venture to repeat that whatever lack existed was in the Public, not in the Poets.

It is hardly too much to claim that from 1807, when Byron's *Hours of Idleness* appeared, to December, 1889, when *Asolando* was published in the course of that day on whose evening Browning died as the great bell of San Marco at

Venice tolled forth ten, that for all that long term of years the British Public lived in the complacently exigent belief that an unfailing supply of great poetry was, by natural right, its to possess if not to read. After the decline of the clumsily-named Lake School, the English-reading Public had watched the sphering of two great planets, Tennyson and Browning: they had lived in the light of such "bright particular stars" as Coventry Patmore, Rossetti and Matthew Arnold, they had delighted themselves with Myers, and for some reason not wholly easy to discern now had greatly admired Clough's works. These poets' achievement, whether regarded piecemeal or *en masse*, had seemed so munificent, so diverse; it had been so acclaimed and extolled, that when the last of the greater among them passed away in 1889, it seemed—at any rate to one observer—as if the Public's dazed condition of bereft, stunned, numbed bewilderment precluded them from due perception and just appreciation of the very remarkable poets still in their midst; men noteworthy not only for their high level of attainment but for their variety and individuality. The last decade of the century was filled by more than a baker's dozen of poets, of whose work, or of much of it, it is not extravagant to use Milton's phrase and say that the future will not readily let it die. To this decade belongs the best work of William Watson; the publication of most of Lord de Tabley's *Poems*; a considerable portion of Stephen Phillips'; one remarkable poem (The Ballad of Reading Gaol) of Oscar Wilde; the best-known and most widely read of Rudyard Kipling's verse; the *London Voluntaries*, and, in 1897, the *Collected Poems* of W. E. Henley; some fine work of John Davidson, widely, tremendously praised about the middle of the "nineties," shelved now by many, possibly on account of his later poems; all Francis Thompson's great contribution to our literature; and sixty-seven of those elusive but markedly original poems, scattered about the pages of various Journals, over the pseudonym "Avodoḡs. These, with a number written in the early years of the new century, were gathered together in 1908, by the hands of a friend, set free at last by the death of Mary Coleridge, who, in her life-time, had refused all urgings to publish them with

her own name attached, on account of her, so groundless, "fear of tarnishing the name which an ancestor had made illustrious in English Poetry." Collected though they were not till 1908, many of them belonged to the previous decade. To these must be added Mrs. Meynell, fitly enough next to Mary Coleridge, for different though they be, there is in both a vein of delicate remoteness which is not their least charm; and the poems of Laurence Housman, specially *The Shropshire Lad*; the charming and delightful verse of Austin Dobson, and, last though far from least, Ernest Dowson's distinctive work. Slightly apart a writer (writers in fact) of plays rather than poems, stand the two ladies who wrote over the name Michael Field, whose play, *Callirhoe* gives us that creature of finest spun poetry, the dancing Fawn. As we recite these names, as the names recall their achievement, we can feel nothing but amazement at a generation which, on the whole, needed so much and such loud telling that it really possessed real poets, and which for all the telling remained for the most part, so stolidly unaware.

While France rejoiced in Jean Moréas, de Regnier, in the collected works of Catulle Mendès (written mostly it is true, in earlier years), in Verlaine, in Vielé-Griffin and last, surely best, in the finely-wrought and chiselled sonnets of de Heredia, and while Belgium received from Verhaeren some of his greatest poems including the stupendous picture of *Night*—

Depuis que dans la plaine immense il s'est fait soir,
Avec de lourds marteaux et des blocs taciturnes,
L'ombre bâtit ses murs et ses donjons nocturnes,
Comme un Escorial revêtu d'argent noir.

Le ciel prodigieux domine, embrasé d'astres,
—Voûte d'ébène et d'or où fourmillent des yeux—
Et s'érigent, d'un jet, vers ce plafond de feux,
Les hêtres et les pins, pareils à des pilastres.

Comme de blancs linceuls éclairés de flambeaux
Les lacs brillent, frappés de lumières stellaires,
Et les hameaux et leurs enclos quadrangulaires
Apparaissent ainsi que d'énormes tombeaux.

Et, telle, avec ses coins et ses salles funébres,
Tout entière bâtie en mystère, en terreur,
La nuit paraît le noir palais d'un empereur
Accoudé, quelque part, au loin, dans les ténèbres—

the English nation, or that portion of it which reads, seemed to find and take a perverse, dismal pleasure in stating over and over again that their own great poets were dead. So they were, some of them: but others lived and even published what they wrote. Without going outside the strict limits of England, a restriction which excludes Robert Louis Stevenson, not a few Irish poets, and the really admirable work of the American priest, Fr. John Tabb,—this last perhaps a gratuitous renunciation as his two volumes were issued in 1894 and 1897 from the Sign of the Bodley Head—the poets of “the Nineties” remain a remarkable band. No one of them can vie with Tennyson in bulk, nor with Browning in variety; but then, can any English poet save Shakspeare produce so vast and varied a gallery of human portraits as Browning?

Watson may be considered first, partly on account of the amount of his work, more for his very definite and clearly differentiated poetic gifts. One of his claims to eminence, not the least of them either, lies in the fact that while his best work is always clearly recognisable as his and not any other’s, it does not lend itself in the smallest degree to parody, which argues a very subtle kind of individuality.

Within the period of “the Nineties” are included *Poems*, February, 1892; *Lachrymæ Musarum*, 1894; *Odes, and Other Poems*, 1894; *The Father of the Forest*, 1895; *The Purple East*, 1896; *The Year of Shame*, 1897, containing fifteen sonnets from *The Purple East* and eight new ones, the whole prefaced by the late Bishop of Hereford; *The Hope of the World*, 1898; while outside the decade are *The Prince’s Quest*, 1880, and the beautiful *Coronation Ode for Edward VII*, 1902.

I suppose, if any one were offered from this list the permanent possession of two, and only two, volumes, he would choose *Poems* and *Odes, and Other Poems*; by which hypothesis I do not mean to imply that any one of them is without something which one would fain keep; nor do I mean to deny that there may have been too much of Watson. But that is true of most of us, even if we have not exceeded in poetry. It was the thin dark volume of *Poems*, not all quite recent, which won the praise of the leading Reviewers. The qualities

most universally lauded are contained in the somewhat comprehensive terms craftsmanship and melody. It would be untrue to urge that his subject-matter was startling or even unusual, with the possible exception of his sonnet on the Sultan Abdul Hamid, a poem which perhaps did not merit entirely the extreme condemnation passed upon it by some critics. But if the contents were not remarkable, Watson's handling of them often was. He had a delicate appreciation of distinctions, of shades of meaning, of suggestions, of hints : he seldom stumbled on a commonplace, and a stock phrase can scarcely be found on his pages. The *Athenæum*, whose judgments at this period of Watson's career were more prized by many Authors than those of any other Journal, wrote, on February 18, 1893, of his "special gifts of discriminating thought and discriminating diction." Of this latter, it wrote in further elaboration, speaking of Watson's habit, "in our days no common one—deliberate perseverance in polishing and repolishing, in seeking and choosing, till every epithet fulfils a purpose, and every phrase has a sparkle on it." This is neither exaggerated nor undeserved praise.

The gift of "discriminating thought" is one not very easy to exemplify by quotations. Perhaps his judgment on that mingled personality who dealt now with education, then with criticism, and elsewhere gave to his country poetry of a singular individuality may serve—

Somewhat of worldling mingled still
With bard and sage.¹

If we will have an instance of this discriminating thought in a matter of literary criticism, we can find a happy one in his tribute to Wordsworth—

Enough that there is none since risen who sings
A song so gotten of the immediate soul,
So instant from the vital fount of things
Which is our source and goal.²

The same power, delightfully mixed with humour, occurs in *A Study in Contrasts*, with considerable success in the portrait of the Collie, rising to a really high level of penetration and observant sympathy in the case of the great Angora—

throned in monumental calm.

¹ In Laleham Churchyard,

² Wordsworth's Grave.

Cats are a mystery few understand, but Watson has at least portrayed one phase of one kind—

Too grey and grave for our adventurous hopes,
For our precipitate pleasures too august,
And in majestic taciturnity
Refraining her illimitable scorn.¹

It is far easier to find instances of Watson's other gift, discriminating diction. That adjective precisely fits the facts. Other poets have other linguistic gifts, but among the English, at any rate, Watson is distinguished beyond most for his absolute aptness, his extraordinary felicity of epithet. I suppose there can scarcely be a cultivated, or indeed an uncultivated person, who has not, at some time or other, fallen captive to the attraction of sea-birds on a desolate shore: but which of us could have seized and imprisoned in human speech the sea-gull's charm as Watson has?—

Lone loiterer where the shells like jewels be,
Hung on the fringe and frayed hem of the sea.²

Did even Pope or Gray excel Watson in this delicate deftness, this apposite perfection of word and phrase? We may open his volume almost at random: these jewels of exquisite speech are scattered lavishly. Will any one describe a poet, then how better than this?—

Shelley, the hectic, flame-like rose of verse,
All colour and all odour and all bloom.³

Or a Century, an era of Thought? Then how surpass these lines upon the English Eighteenth Century?—

Unflushed with ardour, and unblanched with awe,
Her lips in profitless derision curled,
She saw with dull emotion—if she saw—
The vision of the glory of the world.⁴

Will any one capture and present an elect moment of time?—
Then this is it—

At the hushed brink of twilight—when as though
Some solemn journeying phantom paused to lay
An ominous finger on the awe-struck day,
Earth holds her breath till that great presence go.⁵

Will any one appraise earth's powers, or stigmatise a reward,

¹ *A Study in Contrasts.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵ *Odes, and Other Poems*, p. 48.

² *Poems*, p. 169.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

offered but rejected, loftily brushed aside? Then let him recall that scathing phrase—

the loud impertinence of fame.¹

In still subtler things, Watson's gift remains as swiftly penetrating, as indelibly apt. For instance, he thus presents some nameless mortal,—

Child of a thousand chances 'neath the indifferent sky,²

and here an inner condition, an ethical state—

the parsimony of affluent souls,³

and again, a sacrificial offering—

Pain like a worm beneath their feet they trod,
Their souls went up like incense unto God.⁴

In neither of these examples is there anything remote or out of the way; yet expressed just so they are as unforgettable as they are incapable of improvement. As we appreciate their unstrained perfection, and reflect that they are but a tiny sample of his abundant capacity, we can only wonder, in unaffected amazement, at Mr. Pound's charges of "muzziness," riotousness of "half-decayed fruit," and "messy energy." Whatever they are, or are not, they are clean-cut and restrained. He cannot, surely, when he arraigned "the Nineties," have intended to omit William Watson, the period's favourite whipping-boy with the hasty and "superior" critics. This gift of discriminating diction, Mr. Watson did not restrict to phrases or single words; nor did he reserve it for subjects of particular dignity or poignant emotion. To the ordinary mind, the theme of *Night* would not perhaps appeal as a very hopeful one, since the snare of sheer triteness is so obvious, so near. Yet here, where prolonged familiarity and reflection has reduced thought almost to banality, Watson has achieved a notable success in his lines—*Night on Curbar Edge*:—

No echo of man's life pursues my ears;
Nothing disputes this Desolation's reign;
Change comes not, this dread temple to profane,
Where time by æons reckons, not by years.

¹ *Poems*, p. 14.

² *The Hope of the World*, p. 7.

³ *Lachrymæ Musarum*, p. 47.

⁴ *Odes, and Other Poems*, p. 37.

Its patient form, one crag, sole stranded, rears,
 Type of whate'er is destined to remain,
 While yon still host encamped on night's waste plain
 Keeps armed watch, a million quivering spears.
 Hush'd are the wild and wing'd lives of the moor ;
 The sleeping sheep nestle 'neath ruined wall,
 Or unhewn stones in random concourse hurled :
 Solitude, sleepless, listens at Fate's door ;
 And there is built and 'stablish'd over all
 Tremendous silence, older than the world.

A faithful, delicately seen picture which owes nothing to any other poet, not Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold nor any other, unless possibly something in workmanship, e.g. in the gradual rise to that culminating line, to the theory of *Le Parnasse*. So far as I know it has no English forbear nor posterity.

It is just worth while to remember that whereas Tennyson treated Nature with a painter's love, with a naturalist's knowledge, with a happy mortal's spontaneous pleasure, and whereas Wordsworth beheld ever behind the phenomenal, the Real Presence only just veiled, Watson's handling of Nature is that of one who cares first and foremost for human interests, feelings, affairs ; and for Nature just as she serves for the background to or light upon or illustration of these.

Even when it came to so difficult a task as rendering colour in words, Watson achieved a marked degree of success. His love of it, of delicate rather than of opulent colour, escapes often.

In *Wordsworth's Grave* he boldly juxtaposes two fundamentally dissimilar effects—

Not Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine ;
 Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.¹

The colour of even-tide had no little attraction for him. With what consummate skill—the names of the two mountains contributing much—are these lines framed—

Behind Helm Crag and Silver Howe the sheen
 Of the retreating day is less and less.²

There is not one single word definitely descriptive of colour in the following lines—

¹ *Poems* ("Wordsworth's Grave"), p. 151.

² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

Rest we content if whispers from the stars
In waftings of the incalculable wind
Come blown at midnight through our prison-bars,¹

yet it is bathed in lights and shadows and half-glooms. Once, indeed, he flings a wealth of colour on his page—

O vanished morn of crimson and of gold,
O youth of roselight and romance.²

Yet it is in the sonnet immediately preceding this one that he has limned in shades of grey the dead pallor of a disillusioned generation, a generation undone by "the plague of apathy,"—

So soon is dead indifference come,
From wintry sea to sea the land lies numb,
The palsy of the spirit stricken sore,
The land lies numb from iron shore to shore.

In *The Purple East* the opening line is still more beautiful—

Indifference like a dewless night hath come.

One other craftsman's gift Watson possessed, that of melody, sometimes solemn and slow as in *Wordsworth's Grave*; sometimes astonishingly sweet as in his love-songs. Though he never quite achieved the opulent colour, the sonorous pomp of Carew—

Ask me no more where Jove bestows
When June is past the fading rose;
For in your beauty's orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Ask me no more whither do stray
The golden atoms of the day;
For in pure love heaven did prepare
Those powders to enrich your hair,

for indeed these stanzas are remarkable even in the wealth of the erotic verse of Elizabeth's age, yet, among the Elizabethans it would be very hard, if not impossible, to find any song which can surpass the heart-stealing melody of *Tell Me not Now* :—

Tell me not now if love for love
Thou canst return—
Now while around us and above
Day's flambeaux burn.
Not in clear noon with speech as clear
Thy heart avow,
For every gossip wind to hear,
Tell me not now.

¹ *Poems* ("Epigrams"), p. 124. ² *The Year of Shame*, p. 47.

Tell me not now the tidings sweet,
 The news divine ;
 A little longer at thy feet
 Leave me to pine.
 I would not have the gadding bird
 Hear from his bough ;
 Nay, though I famish for a word
 Tell me not now !

But when deep trances of delight
 All Nature seal,
 When round the world the arms of Night
 Caressing steal ;
 When rose to dreaming rose says " *Dear
 Dearest,*"—and when
 Heaven sighs her secret in earth's ear,
 Ah ! tell me then !

Though it is possible that in appreciation of colour Watson lacked the sense of richness, yet in the sister gift of song he could rise to a torrent of lyrical sound. Any poet might well be forgiven if, after Shelley, he let the skylark go unsung afresh. But Watson essayed the task, and attained. These ringing stanzas to the *First Skylark in Spring* will surely never pass from the memories of English lovers of poetry—

Thy spirit knows nor bounds nor bars ;
 On thee no shreds of thralldom hang ;
 Not more enlarged the morning stars
 Their great TE DEUM sang.

Thou sing'st of what he¹ knew of old,
 And dreamlike from afar recalls :
 In flashes of forgotten gold
 An orient glory falls.

And as he listens, one by one
 Life's utmost splendours blaze more nigh ;
 Less inaccessible the sun,
 Less alien grows the sky.

For thou art native to the spheres,
 And of the courts of heaven art free,
 And carriest to his temporal ears
 News of eternity.

And lead'st him to the dizzy verge,
 And lur'st him o'er the dazzling line,
 Where mortal and immortal merge,
 And human dies divine.

Small wonder that the *Times* called Watson's "true poetry" ;
 that Walter Besant said it possessed "such a ring of poetry

¹ i.e. Man.

as we have not had for a long time"; that Andrew Lang declared that "we may call it finished and almost perfect." The surprising thing is that English people should have felt so grumpy and dispirited and dubious about their country's poetic outlook.

Perhaps, excellent poet though he was, perhaps it would be temerarious to compare Watson, with his abundance and therefore inequality, to de Heredia who gave the world so sparse a harvest of finest wrought verse. But in spite of that, it may still be legitimate to hang Watson's portrait of *Antony at Actium*—

He holds a dubious balance :—yet *that* scale
Whose freight the world is surely shall prevail ?
No ! Cleopatra droppeth into *this*
One counterpoising orient sultry kiss—¹

on the walls of our memory, a little lower than, yet not quite away from, de Heredia's imperishable picture—

Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles claires ;
Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent Impérator
Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères.²

In spite of the laudatory criticisms already quoted, there were discordant notes in the chorus. One notably was furnished by the *Quarterly Review*, that Journal which had erred notoriously on an occasion long before it handled William Watson. The particular charges which it urged against him were first this statement, "an absolute minor poet he is fated to remain"; and secondly, and since no settled definition of "minor poet" has ever been agreed on, a worse, that he possessed "the journalistic knack of blushing for his country and 'spoiling for a fight.'" Probably, this not peculiarly elegant criticism refers to his Armenian Sonnets, published first as *The Purple East*, and almost at once republished with additions as *The Year of Shame*. In the first place, when a poet writes on a political subject, it ought to be remembered that *literary* judgment should put the political matter aside. No politician judges matter, contents,

¹ *Poems* ("Epigrams"), p. 132.

² *Les Trophées*, 1^{ier} ed., p. 77.

from an unbiassed point of view ; further, very few people and very few critics are without any trace of political bias. But if this qualification be disallowed, even so, now that torrents of blood have flowed, in all the brutal oppression of Armenians by Turks during these twenty years which separate us from the first appearance of *The Purple East*, would not a great body of reputable thinkers maintain that events have justified Watson rather than the Quarterly Reviewer ? It was no doubt the twentieth sonnet, *To The Sultan*, published in *The Year of Shame*, which caused critical annoyance. Yet it was but a retort to criticism on former milder blame which Watson had apportioned : as a retort it was undeniably brilliant, it contained three musical and picturesque lines, and even as abuse it was gentle in comparison with the terms recently lavished, and so justly, on Abdul Hamid's friend, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Can it be that since 1914 our nation has gradually wakened up to the desirability of recognising facts and calling a spade a spade ? If so, then all honour to Mr. Watson for forestalling by a score or so of years his anæmic critics. Moreover, if *The Purple East* and its later renamed self be criticised from the point of view of form and manner, then, at any rate, we shall find, even in the volume which his admirers, were they forced to part with one, would perhaps choose to yield up, his characteristic qualities ; viz. his love of beauty free from all sensuousness, no slight an achievement in his era, his swift picturesqueness, his deft and exquisite wording. For instance, in *The Awakening* there is a picture of England almost Tennysonian in its vital beauty—

Behold she is risen,
Lovelier in resurrection than the face
Of vale or mountain, when, with storming tears
At all Earth's portals knocks the importunate Spring.¹

For happy phrasing the lines accounting for England's greatness are worth quotation—

She who was great because so oft she cast
All thoughts of peril to the waves that heave
Against her feet.²

¹ *The Year of Shame*, p. 67.

² *The Purple East*, p. 33.

If any one ask for an example of his flashing descriptiveness there is that wonderful picture—

Still on Life's loom, the infernal warp and weft
Woven each hour ! Still, in august renown
A great realm watching, under God's great frown.¹

But more may be claimed still, and just this, that Mr. Watson saw where others were blind, or, if they were not blind, chose to behave as if they were. Surely in the midst of the World War those tremendous words about Europe—

Yet haply she shall learn, too late,
In some blind hurricane of Fate,
How fiercely alive the things
She held as fool's imaginings,
And, though circuitous and obscure
The feet of Nemesis how sure—²

may seem to more than a few among us as great in prevision as they are tense in expression. If this really be the "journalistic knack," would that more journalists used this their acquired skill. What there is of "muzziness" or rotten-fruited decay in all this one may well be puzzled to discover.

For long years before Watson wrote, one of the most remarkable and original, and it is not an exaggeration to say one of the least known poets of the time, John Leicester Warren, Lord de Tabley, was polishing, ornamenting, embroidering verse, of which very much waited years before it saw the light.

No account of "the Nineties" can omit to mention that unexpected moment in November, 1893, when readers of the *Nineteenth Century* were suddenly startled by the magnificent imagery and moving passion of *Orpheus in Hades*. At that moment, however, the poet's work was not quite unknown, for a volume, *Poems Dramatic and Lyrical* had been issued in a beautiful dress earlier in that same year from the Sign of the Bodley Head. As long ago as 1864, another volume, *Eclogues and Monologues*, had appeared, but then under a pseudonym, W. P. Lancaster. A prefatory note to *Poems Dramatic and Lyrical* expressly assigned the composition of most of its contents to years long past.

¹ *The Purple East*, p. 45. ² *The Year of Shame*, p. 75.

Though in the Second Series of *Poems Dramatic and Lyrical*, published in 1895, the date of the composition of *Orpheus in Hades* is not expressly given, Lord de Tabley speaks of its first *publication* in 1893. It may therefore fairly be taken as belonging to "the Nineties." It made a deep impression, as indeed it deserved to do, for after all can poignancy achieve more than in this Lament for Eurydice?—

Then as twilight fell,
 With torch and taper rounded, crowned with yew,
 Wailing we bore her to the cypress lines,
 Sown with the urns and ash of fiery hearts
 Of old-world lovers, cold and gone to dust.
 Thither we bore her pallid on her bier.
 A silver moon cradled in ebon cloud;
 And over her we sprinkled marigolds,
 Flowers of the dead, stars on the sable pall,
 And there was one more gravestone, one more heart
 Broken, and in the world no other change.

What right have I to live so crushed with woe?
 I dare not see the light now she is gone.
 I hate to watch the flower set up its face,
 I loathe the trembling shimmer of the sea,
 Its heaving roods of intertangled weed
 And orange sea-wrack with its necklace fruit;
 The stale insipid cadence of the dawn,
 The ring-dove, tedious harper on five tones,
 The eternal havoc of the sodden leaves
 Rotting the floors of Autumn. I am weary,
 Weary and incomplete and desolate.
 To me, Spring sceptred with her daffodil
 Droops with a blight of dim mortality,
 And the birds sing Death and Eurydice.

Ah, dear and unforgotten! on the wind
 Her voice comes often, low and sweet it comes.

It is easy to prove that Lord de Tabley possessed the poet's vision and the poet's gift of melodious language, as for instance, in this verse from a poem addressed to the Lady of his desire—

My life is as a lonely woodland mere,
 Whose sullen waters without sun repose.
 And thou one ivory lily floating here,
 Marble and white, flushed with a hint of rose.

Further, he possessed those other gifts of colour and of ornament for sheer delight in it, which makes some, though only some, of his verse a kind of analogue to Pater's gold-

encrusted and bejewelled prose. This passage from *Circe* might have inspired a Burne-Jones picture—

And near this tulip, reared across a loom
Hung a fair web of tapestry half done,
Crowding with folds and fancies half the room :
Men eyed as gods and damsels still as stone,
Pressing, their brows alone,
In amethystine robes ;
Or reaching at the polished orchard globes,
Or rubbing parted love-lips on their rind,
While the wind
Sows with sere apple leaves their breast and hair.
And all the margin there
Was arabesqued and bordered intricate
With hairy spider things
That catch and clamber,
And salamander in his dripping cave
Satanic ebon-amber ;
Blind worm and asp, and eft of cumbrous gait,
And toads who love rank grasses near a grave,
And the great goblin moth, who bears
Between his wings the ruined eyes of death ;
And the enamelled sails
Of butterflies, who watch the morning's breath.
And many an emerald lizard with quick ears
Asleep in rocky dales.
And for an outer fringe embroidered small
A ring of many locusts, horny-coated,
A round of chirping tree-frogs merry-throated
And sly, fat fishes sailing, watching all.

Yet, in all that wealth of words, if any one will be at pains to analyse this passage, in its place as part of *Circe's* enchanted chamber, there is no wanton prodigality, no dragging in of strange epithet or bizarre effect for sheer affectation's sake. Just that picture—how could it be conveyed otherwise ?

In many of his moods, Lord de Tabley was a painter who chose to use words rather than pigments : yet he was more than a painter, more than a

landscape-lover, lord of language,

for he had no less quick and penetrating vision in the world of human thought and character. Possibly, no art nor artifice could ever wholly change our view of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Probably, for most of us, she will ever stand as the deliberate violator of the sacred mysteries of hospitality. Moreover, few would care to attempt to sing again what the Hebrew Poet sang once and incomparably. Lord de Tabley essayed it all ; to sing it afresh, and, one might almost say, to

Jael's credit ; to sing it, at any rate, with the scantest possible regard for

that old, lean, shrewing prophetess
Gray as a she-wolf,

or for

Israel's captain, holding by her skirt

who

Sang second to her raving with loud words
And hare-like eyes that look on either side,
As if in dread dead Sisera should rise
And drive him howling up the vale in fear
With nimble heels.

If, in the end, all Lord de Tabley's skill cannot avail to win our liking for Jael, yet perhaps the wailing lament of the household drudge, nursing a deathless ambition, as in lonely woe she reviews the dread events of the dreadful day, may somewhat change the light—

at even I beheld
A goodly man and footsore, whom I knew ;
And then my dream rushed on my soul once more ;
Saying, This man is weary, lure him in,
And slay him ; and behold eternal fame
Shall blare thy name up to the stars of GOD.
I called him and he came. The rest is blood
And doom and desolation till I die.

Then, in his last volume, there is that poem which, alien though it be to English poetry, has with its gray lights and sharp shadows some touch of the French *Symboliste* School for which Ernest Dowson was eventually to build a fortuitous home in practical England ; *Sorrow Invincible*, the story of the woman who faded by imperceptible but sure degrees from her warmed lighted home, slipped irrevocably beyond the ken of her best beloved, leaving her husband consumed with desire to escape, to follow—

For I saw her in moonlight gray,
Veiled round with a crescent of light ;
A ray at her hand, from her hand came a ray,
Like a wave on a starry night.

I shall see her again, when my head
Snaps sudden in death at one blow,
You won't keep me then in this bed,
Out of window my spirit will go,

Over seas, over seas to my sweet,
Out into the great dawn there.

The *Athenæum* hailed Lord de Tabley's volumes with rather marked enthusiasm, declaring that Jael alone gave him "a high place among contemporary poets." It is interesting to note that of his "thorough knowledge of botany," the same reviewer wrote: "Not even Tennyson's nomenclature of natural objects is more invariably accurate."

Neither William Watson nor Lord de Tabley would have considered themselves religious poets; indeed, it is not too much to say that the latter often wrote like a frank and candid pagan. But "the Nineties" revealed one, than whom perhaps no greater, no more really religious poet has ever adorned English literature, Francis Thompson. It may be that Mr. Ezra Pound's charges of "muzziness" and riotousness were aimed at him. If so, it would be easy to subtract the one or two possible justifications, leaving Thompson very little the poorer, and still a supreme and magnificent poet. *Par excellence*, he is "of the Nineties," for in publication wholly, and largely in composition his poetry lies within the decade: *Poems* appeared in 1893, *Sister Songs* in 1895, and *New Poems* in 1897. In these the bulk of his verse is contained, though it is true that a few additions were included in the collected edition of his works published posthumously. As a religious poet his work has been noted in the preceding chapter: but if "the Nineties" are to be relieved of the charges brought so vigorously against them, Thompson cannot be omitted here. As the question here is of his significance to his own decade, the critic will not turn to the two definitive volumes which Mr. Meynell edited after the poet's death, but rather to the three books as they appeared, the square, brown-drab *Poems* of 1893, *Sister Songs*, actually written four years before they appeared, and *New Poems* in 1897.

Perhaps, since the English are superlatively a forgetful people, it may be just worth while to recall the environment of 1893, when *Poems* appeared. Its contemporaries were Mrs. Meynell's *Preludes* (though as these were originally published in 1875, and merely republished in 1893, they should scarcely be included); Mr. Richard le Gallienne's *English Poems*, Mr. Arthur Symons' *Silhouettes* and Mr.

Henley's *London Voluntaries* all in 1892 ; Lord de Tabley's *Poems Dramatic and Lyrical*, and, curiously remote from those, Mr. Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* both in 1893.

Surely not one of these can be held to have won the established position in English literature which is now Francis Thompson's. Probably Yeats stands nearest to him, though his volume of poems appeared later, in 1895. But it is only in the vaguest way that it would be possible to compare them ; both are genuine and original poets, writing out of an irresistible inspiration, and there the likeness stops. For the rest, Yeats' verse, deliberate as was his purpose to create a national "school," in itself sprang from the spontaneous elemental simplicity of Ireland, while Thompson's is the wrought, polished art which appears rarely enough anywhere. But if the contemporaries of Thompson were outstripped by him, yet they were poets indeed. Mr. Arthur Symons, whose harsh judgments were hardly to be expected from a brother craftsman, wins the title, were it only on the strength of these beautiful lines—

The sea lies quieted beneath
The after-sunset flush
That leaves upon the heaped grey clouds
The grape's faint purple blush.

Pale, from a little space in heaven
Of delicate ivory,
The sickle-moon and one gold star
Look down upon the sea.

Perhaps of all the poets of "the Nineties," Mr. le Gallienne, whose resounding popularity some twenty years ago has died down almost into oblivion, drew from the shallowest stream of inspiration. The sonnet on Matthew Arnold has been acclaimed as among his best. Yet, as we read it—

Within that wood where thine own scholar strays,
O ! Poet, thou art passed, and at its bound,
Hollow and sere, we cry, yet win no sound,
But the dark muttering of the forest maze
We may not tread, nor pierce with any gaze ;
And hardly love dare whisper thou hast found
That restful moonlit-slope of pastoral ground
Set in dark dingles of the songful ways.

Gone ! they have called our shepherd from the hill,
Passed is the sunny sadness of his song,
That song which sang of sight and yet was brave
To lay the ghosts of seeing, subtly strong
To wean from tears, and from the troughs to save ;
And who shall teach us now that he is still ?—

we cannot but feel that it recalls two memorable passages from Arnold's own verse ; passages with which this sonnet cannot vie. As the octave brings back the well-beloved lines—

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high half-reap'd field,
And here till sundown, shepherd ! will I be.
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
Pale blue convolvulus in tendrils creep ;
And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade,
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers ;

so does the sestet challenge comparison with—

where will Europe's later hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power ?
Others will teach us how to dare
And against fear our breast to steel,
Others will strengthen us to bear
But who, ah ! who will make us feel ?
The cloud of mortal destiny,
Others will front it fearlessly—
But who, like him will put it by ?

And it is idle to pretend that Mr. le Gallienne's verse can bear the test of that comparison.

Of Lionel Johnson's work, since his editor seems rather haughtily to remove him from " the Nineties," something shall be said later.

Into this small assembly of poets, Thompson entered. It must be admitted that at the outset most of the critics blundered, if all of them not quite so patently as Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, who, when reviewing Thompson in the *Speaker*¹ included " monstrance " among " words not easily allowed by any one possessing a sense of the history of language " ; a rather unfortunate example of very genuine provincialism.

Mr. Everard Meynell refers to Lionel Johnson's declara-

¹ May 29, 1897.

tion that Francis Thompson "had done more to harm the English language than the worst American newspapers." This ferocious charge occurred in some notes on co-temporary poets, sent by Johnson to Mrs. Tynan Hinkson, with the remark: "These notes are very poor, hasty stuff, barely intelligible; but they try to be true." They were published after his death, in the *Dublin Review*; and Mr. Pound has included them in his Preface to Johnson's Collected Poems.¹ Whether they were intended for serious, considered criticism or no, it is worth while to remember that slashingly as he wrote of most of some dozen of his co-temporaries, yet alongside of this sentence quoted by Mr. Meynell, Johnson wrote such sentences as these of Thompson: "Magnificently faulty at times, magnificently perfect at others"; and again, "Incapable of prettiness and pettiness," and once more, "*Sublime* rather than *noble*." Such qualifying judgments of that one desperate taunt, are, from an admitted critic, worth much, where the majority blundered notoriously.

The *Athenæum* allowed Mr. Arthur Symons to swell the general chorus of contemptuous fault-finding. On February 3, 1894, reviewing the *Poems* published in the previous year, Mr. Symons committed himself to a judgment which it is difficult to believe he would not have been glad afterwards to recall; a judgment which the *Athenæum's* later treatment of Thompson, as poet and as one of its own contributors, completely reversed. Symons actually wrote these disastrous criticisms: "His work with all its splendour has the impress of no individuality, it is a splendour of rags and patches, a very masque of anarchy"; and again, "A poet, with any individuality to express, could scarcely, one fancies, have been drawn by any natural affinity so far away from himself and his main habitudes. Crashaw and Mr. Patmore . . . can a man serve two such masters?" Without labouring the argument that the affinity between Crashaw and Coventry Patmore may have been less remote than Mr. Symons seems to imagine, a more fundamental and cogent answer is that Francis served no human master.

¹ *Poetical Works* of Lionel Johnson, p. xii.

Of this particular review, Thompson wrote to Mr. Meynell : " But the *Athenæum* !—call you this dealing favourably with a man ? Heaven save me then from the unfavourable dealers." Of the writer, Thompson declared : " He is the only critic of mine I think downright unfair."

Of all the poems in this earliest book, one only—*A Corymbus for Autumn*—could be held to deserve really severe criticism, and, even then, not the particular criticism which Mr. Symons launched at large. Moreover, among its companions were *Dream Tryst*, *The Dead Cardinal of Westminster*, *The Hound of Heaven* and *Daisy*.

Among the critics who wrote with disapprobation, not the least scathing was Mr. Andrew Lang, who, for his pains, earned from Patmore the deserved comment,—confided to Mr. Meynell,—“ Lang is a clever donkey.” The whole story of this curious and obtuse reviewing has been preserved, fortunately enough ; for it is interesting not only on account of its crass injustice and density, but because it is, after all, only an extreme instance of a blindness and misdirection which are far too common. It is to be found in Mr. Everard Meynell's " Life " of the Poet.

It was Coventry Patmore who, in the *Fortnightly Review*, expressed, with more gravity than to Mr. Meynell, his estimate of Thompson's work. That he was the penetratingly just critic is perhaps shewn by the fact that the first edition of five hundred copies was published in November, 1893, the second in January, 1894, the third on February 1, 1894. Fifteen hundred copies in three months suffice as proof of value, without being those huge, advertised, editions which in themselves discredit an author.

Why the critics blundered so completely will remain one of the puzzles of literary criticism. This volume opened with a portion of the sequence of poems, brought at last all together in the definitive edition of his works under their original title, *Love in Dian's Lap*. To the final collection was prefixed the *Proemion*, and five extra poems were added. At least two of these, *In Her Paths* and *After Her Going*, were as beautiful as any of the original seven, not forgetting the fifth, with its first stanza—

Her soul from earth to heaven lies,
 Like the ladder of the vision,
 Where on go
 To and fro
 In ascension and demission
 Star-flecked feet of Paradise.

Addressed to the Lady who presided over that home opened to his half-wrecked direful distress, they were described, with a daring intensity characteristic of the critic, by Coventry Patmore, in the *Fortnightly Review* for July, 1894, as "a series of poems which S. John of the Cross might have addressed to S. Teresa"; a description endorsed by the lines

You did not see
 Essence of old, essential pure as she.
 For this was even that Lady, and none other
 The man in me calls "Love," the child calls "Mother."

Anyone who will compare them with any poetry in English literature will be fain to confess, that they are incomparable: there are none others remotely like them, they stand irrevocably alone. Turning the pages, the reader came upon *The Hound of Heaven*, that ode so praised, so quoted, so incessantly reprinted that it is not improbable that to many its greatness is blunted by familiarity, its awe staled by repetition. Yet how singular it is. Where in the whole range of our literature can we match its particular pathos of appeal?—

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
 My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
 And smitten me to my knee;
 I am defenceless utterly.

In *Dream Tryst* are combined an imaginative genius, a music and a colour beside which Dante Rossetti,—no mean artist in these things—pales into twilight, trembles into silence:—

The breaths of kissing night and day
 Were mingled in the eastern Heaven:
 Throbbing with unheard melody
 Shook Lyra all its star-chord seven:
 When dusk shrunk cold, and light trod shy,
 And dawn's grey eyes were troubled grey;
 And souls went palely up the sky,
 And mine to Lucidé.

Besides all this, if anyone bewildered, even alarmed by the pale strange lights of dispassionate love, will crave for the human feelings of every day, and the homely claim of wild nature, let him turn the pages of the early volume, till he treads in fancy the close fragrant turf of the Sussex Downs round dreaming Storrington—

Where the thistle lifts a purple crown
Six foot out of the turf,
And the hare-bell shakes on the windy hill—
O the breath of the distant surf.

The hills look over to the South,
And southward dreams the sea;
And with the sea-breeze hand-in-hand
Came innocence and she.

Oh, there were flowers in Storrington
On the turf and on the spray ;
But the sweetest flower on Sussex Hills
Was the Daisy-flower that day !

She looked a little wistfully,
Then went her sunshine way :—
The sea's eye had a mist on it,
And the leaves fell from the day.

While he thus caught the peculiar charm of the Sussex hills, he did not miss or overlook the pomp and circumstance of the rich weed-gemmed wheatlands at their base—

Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare
And left the flushed print in a poppy there !
Like a yawn of fire from the earth it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame.

With burnt mouth, red like a lion's, it drank
The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
When the Eastern conduits ran with wine.

To this decade also belong *Sister Songs* and *New Poems*, whose great *Odes* shew what beautiful pictures thronged his imagination and flung themselves broadcast upon his pages ; pictures such as this—

daylight

When like the back of a gold mailed saurian
Heaving its slow length from Nilotic slime,
The first long gleaming fissure runs Aurorian
Athwart the yet dun firmament of prime ;

or again this of the sea-cinctured Earth—

Swift Tellus' purpled tunic, girt upon
With the blown chlamys of the fluttering seas.

He is not less successful when he just contents himself with pure description of a sight, after all so familiar that many pass it by unseen—

The long laburnum drips
Its honey of wild flame ; its jocund spilth of fire.

In all this perfection of images, in the wealth of form and colour so dear to him, sound comes too to add its quota : in him the music of the world found an alert and appreciative listener—

what little noises stir and pass
From blade to blade along the voluble grass.

The tiny evanescent sounds of nature, the loud archangelic note—he has an ear for them all, and daringly juxtaposes them in a single couplet—

Green spray showers lightly down the cascade of the larch,
The graves are riven.

If the *Corymbus for Autumn* be excepted, what is there in Thompson's poetry, of which the above choice of passages, taken pretty much at random, are a fair example, to justify Mr. Pound's charges of " muzziness " and " riotous decay " ? Surely nothing at all.

In a previous chapter it has been urged that his poetry is, in some of its aspects, the embroidered pageantry of Catholicism. Though the point is far more difficult to prove by scattered excerpts, it is not less true to claim that in Mrs. Meynell's poetry we find its informing spirit and power. A minor difficulty, in this day of collected editions, too is to avoid all mistake as to the precise date of individual poems. A few are located by events ; some of them obviously lie outside the particular decade, like *The Fugitive*, so manifestly elicited by a public blasphemy in France—*Nous avons chassé ce Jésus Christ*, a poem which, however, illustrates so well those most individual elements which make up all her

work that it may be pardonable to quote it out of its place in time :—

Yes, from the ingrate heart, the street
Of garrulous tongue, the warm retreat
Within the village and the town ;
Not from the lands where ripen brown
A thousand, thousand hills of wheat.

Not from the long Burgundian line,
The southward, sunward range of vine,
Hunted, He never will escape
The flesh, the blood, the sheaf, the grape
That feeds His man,—the bread, the wine.¹

The poems which belong, more or less strictly, to " the Nineties " are those included in the volume which was issued in 1901, and were not reprints from *Preludes*. One of these, *Advent Meditation*, is separated no doubt by the lapse of a few years from the above stanzas, yet in their incomparable and so characteristic simplicity they are closely related—

No sudden thing of glory and of fear
Was the Lord's coming, but the dear
Slow Nature's days followed each other
To form the Saviour from his Mother.
—One of the children of the year.

It is difficult to think of anyone else who could have written that last line. Of her less definitely religious poems, the two most perfect and probably best known, *An Unmarked Festival* and *Renouncement*—concerning the latter no one can wonder at Dante Gabriel Rossetti's praise lavished on it—do not belong to this decade. But the following, delicately characteristic in its religious devoutness and human pathos, falls, I believe, in the chosen years :—

Why wilt thou chide
Who hast attained to be denied ?
O learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord
Of an unpurchaseable word.

It cannot be contended that her poems owed anything marked to the era wherein they were written, or to the atmosphere or poetic theory, if these existed, to be found

¹ *Collected Poems*, Alice Meynell, p. 102.

among her co-temporaries : all of them, from 1875 bear a personal mark which divides them from any school, and clears them from every charge of current influences. Their perfection will never be yielded up to a hasty or single reading. Very possibly, they are unequal. Whose work is not ? Equability after all is no pledge of genius, no guarantee of profundity, whether of thought or feeling. Increasing familiarity with them cannot stale them, but will rather induce assent to Thompson's declaration—

We know what never-cadent Sun
Thy lampéd clusters throbbed upon,
What pluméd feet the wine-press trod ;
Thy wine is flavorfulous of God.
Whatever singing robe thou wear
Has the Paradisal air ;
And some gold feather it has kept
Shows what floor it lately swept.

All who prize Mrs. Meynell's *Poems* may be well content to leave them so. By the side of them, in an utterly different vein, very much less well known, yet of singular worth, we may fitly remember those poems of Mary Coleridge which belong to "the Nineties," namely, none later than No. lxviii in the little collection of her poems which Mr. Newbolt edited in November, 1907, and which, by 1908, were already in the fourth edition. Mr. Newbolt did not date the poems, on the plea that "their order in time does not in any way coincide with their order in merit" : but he tells us she wrote verse for about twenty-five years, namely, from 1882-1907. Probably, therefore, some of the early ones belong to the eighties, while some of the most remarkable, e.g. *In London Town*, or that Hymn of Battle—

Arm thee ! Arm thee ! Forth upon the road !
Michael is calling the hosts of God,

or those two most striking stanzas enshrining the immortality of ideas, a reminder so bitterly needed in our materialistic days—

Egypt's might is tumbled down—

belong to the new century.

Still, among the poems of the decade is to be found the

delightful *Wilderspin*, too long for quotation here, but unforgettable by reason of its vivid reality, its entrancing haunting pictures.

It is a literary curiosity that among these poems, whose latest date is 1898, we find one—No. lii—called *L'Oiseau Bleu*. Here are its two verses—

The lake lay blue below the hill,
O'er it, as I looked, there flew
Across the waters, cold and still
A bird whose wings were palest blue.

The sky above was blue at last,
The sky beneath as blue as blue.
A moment ere the bird had passed
It caught his image as it flew.

It seems exceedingly improbable that these eight lines were known to M. Maeterlinck when he wrote his now famous play, first produced in Moscow in 1908, exactly ten years after Miss Coleridge's latest date of writing : yet who will deny the kinship of these blue-birds ?

Miss Coleridge's poems may never enjoy widespread popularity ; they represent a kind of verse which has more vogue in France than among ourselves, the poetry of vagrant moods, of evanescent dreams, of swiftly passing, caught-as-they-fly impressions. Mr. Pound must surely either have been unaware of these clearly-seen, deftly-outlined little songs, or have forgotten them when he launched those reckless charges of his. To avoid the tediousness of battering a proposition to pieces with every possible argument one can find, barest mention may suffice for Mr. Newbolt's own ringing songs of valour, his pride in youthful illustrious life ; for the passion and colour of John Davidson ; for the often beautiful blank verse of Stephen Phillips, over-rated once as under-rated now ; for the astonishing variety of Rudyard Kipling, whether he exhibit it in the biting satire of *Pagett, M.P.*, was a liar, or in that quaint little song of monkey sorrows—

Our fathers frisked in the millet,
Our fathers skipped in the wheat ;

or, more remarkably still, in the exercise of that gift which he possessed of rendering the pathos of life in terms of something

closely akin to vulgarity, and that the most glaring type of Cockney vulgarity, a pathos which he carries up to the height of human love and down to the depths of human sorrow, in *Gunga Din*, for example, or *Gentlemen Rankers*, in the haunting melody of *Mandalay*, but most irresistibly of all in *They're Hangin' Danny Deever in the Morning*. This excellent work, all forged during "the Nineties," shall be just treasured in remembrance here, in order that space may remain for the work of Ernest Dowson, so individual that no critic of the decade could reasonably omit it. Of all that band of so-called minor poets whom the deaf, superior "Public" scorned, Dowson, when he writes in his own person, and not as a translator, is nearest of all to the French *Symboliste* school.

He translated Verlaine's

Le ciel est par-dessus le toit
Si bleu, si calme ;
Un arbre par-dessus le toit
Berce sa palme.

La cloche dans le ciel qu'on voit,
Doucement tinte ;
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit
Chante sa plainte,

yet his excellent enough version of this much-translated person is less Verlainesque than his own original composition—

In the deep violet air
Not a leaf is stirred ;
There is no sound heard
But afar, the rare
Trilled voice of a bird.¹

His life, as we all know, was irregular with that dreadful kind of futility which cannot grasp the harsh sense of S. Augustine's counsel, *Pecca fortiter* : sin to no purpose as it were being of all sin, surely, the most fatuous, the most deplorable. His youth and power were wasted utterly. None the less he knew, really knew, the reality, meaning and worth of religion. Scattered up and down among the poems of passion or fugitive fancy, there glint like sparse stars on a storm-cloudy night, such gems as *Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration*, or *Extreme Unction*, or *Benedictio Domini*. Such conjunction of

¹ *Poems*, by Ernest Dowson, p. 70.

gross deliberate sin with delicate religious perception ever shocks the rigorous and admittedly is a grievous thing ; yet a religion not meant for sinners would be as strange as sinners who never hungered for religion.

For the practical, the mechanical, the materialistic, he has no "message," no discernible significance. If any one will ask what are his poems about, who can answer ?

A land of Silence
Where pale stars shine
On apple blossoms
And dew-drenched vine
Be yours and mine.

What an invitation to comfortable dividend-hunters and bustling business men ! Arthur Symons wrote of him : " With a soul too shy to tell its own secret, except in exquisite evasions, he desired the boundless confidence of love,"¹ a judgment which hardly seems to account for the sonnet to *Seraphita*—

Come not before me now, O visionary face !
Me tempest-tossed, and borne along life's passionate sea ;
Troublous and dark and stormy though my passage be ;
Not here and now may we commingle and embrace,
Lest the loud anguish of the waters should efface
The bright illumination of thy memory,
Which dominates the night ; rest far away from me,
In the serenity of thy abiding place !

But when the storm is highest, and the thunders blare,
And sea and sky are riven, O moon of all my night !
Stoop down but once in pity of my great despair,
And let thine hand though over late to help, alight
But once upon my pale eyes and my drowning hair,
Before the great waves conquer in the last vain fight,

nor does it seem to fit *Impenitentia Ultima* any better. Dowson occupies a niche apart in "the Nineties," but he cannot and does not fall under Mr. Pound's ban. His natural sympathies were kindled to a brighter glow, his native affinities were intensified by his long residence in France : he is the *Symboliste* of England, perhaps the only one. Being so much an alien among his surroundings, he was daringly iconoclastic concerning the ordinary Englishman's prejudices. In the midst of the "nation of shopkeepers," he will extol the

¹ *Poems*, by Ernest Dowson, Introduction, p. xvii.

Carthusian ideal. Did some of their predecessors, remembering still the smoke and din of Tyburn, steal back and linger round him as he, turning from the disarray of his irregular existence, wrote of their ordered peace?—

It was not theirs with Dominic to preach God's holy wrath,
They were too stern to bear sweet Francis' gentle sway;
Theirs was a higher calling and a steeper path,
To dwell alone with Christ, to meditate and pray.

A cloistered company, they are companionless,
None knoweth here the secret of his brother's heart:
They are but come together for more loneliness,
Whose bond is solitude and silence all their part.

To the chiselled craftsmanship of Watson, the brocaded sumptuous magnificence of Lord de Tabley, to the varied splendours of Thompson and the aloof charm of Mrs. Meynell, to Housman's love of the country-side, to the rollicking life and trumpet-toned patriotism of Kipling, to Newbolt's stimulus and the old-world grace of Austin Dobson, Dowson added his alien, elusive, fugitive music and light. No one who would appraise aright the last efforts of the dying century, a century of vast changes and far-reaching upheaval, can possibly leave this shipwrecked youth out of the reckoning.

Mr. Pound differentiates Lionel Johnson from the other writers of the decade, declaring that "his verse is that of small slabs of ivory, firmly combined and contrived"; a criticism which seems to fit him as imperfectly as "muzziness" describes the rest. What is there of "slabs of ivory," large or small, about this verse from a poem which has been described as unsurpassed by none and equalled by few of his contemporaries¹—

And yet great spirits ride thy winds: thy ways
Are haunted and enchanted evermore.
Thy children hear the voices of old days
In music of the sea upon thy shore,
In falling of the waters from thine hills,
In whispers of thy trees:
A glory from the things eternal fills
Their eyes, and at high noon thy people sees
Visions, and wonderful is all the air.
So upon the earth they share
Eternity: they learn it at thy knees.²

¹ *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, by E. A. Boyd, p. 192.

² *Poetical Works* of Lionel Johnson, p. 142.

In its beautiful phrasing, in its intimate and profound grasp of the spiritual hid beneath the material, in its passionate love of the homeland, that poem stands in the same great lineage as Watson's *Night on Curbar Edge*, or Thompson's *Daisy*, or Mrs. Meynell's *Fugitive*: Johnson is not to be disassociated lightly and easily from his era.

A decade which can shew such work as this which has been here passed in hasty review, is only by a perverse or ignorant misuse of language stigmatised as a period of decline or impotence.

It must not be forgotten that over and above all this there has been a considerable mass of what may be called stray poetic work, far greater than the unsuspecting public dreams. The dismal truth is that readers of poetry are fewer in number than they should be. If as many people in England cared as much for poetry as they do for ha'penny newspapers, an attack on " the Nineties " would have been a forlorn hope, and a defence of them quite gratuitous. The present defence, inadequate as it is, is merely an attempt to unroll panoramically the dignity, the variety, the amplitude, the delicacy and the suggestiveness of these poets who adorned the decade. And the conclusion surely is that the poets of the first decade of the twentieth century, including " the Georgians," all, that is, save Rupert Brooke and James Elroy Flecker, both prematurely lost to this world, will, all of them, be forced to doff their greening laurels and lay them low in homage when the Shades of the last Victorians emerge from the vanished past, and offer us once more of their glorious best.

VI. Theories of Poetry

A PASSION for theory has been a marked characteristic of recent years in Europe, and may easily outrun common sense. Even if it be necessary in many departments of life, and obviously it is so, its necessity in the region of poetry, has not always been acknowledged. To realise this we need but recall the scorn poured on Wordsworth, when he ventured not only to possess but to publish a theory. Yet after all, everything which can be called human achievement is inspired by an idea and executed according to some principle, which is an admission, just differently expressed, that theory, explicit or implicit, is incidental to every serious endeavour.

Anyhow, whether it be generally recognised or no, three ideals have, in greater or less degree, underlain much of the poetry published in France and England during the last sixty or seventy years, while the poetry of Ireland has not remained a stranger to them.

The first of the three is the movement which arose in France and was known as *Le Parnasse*. Inaugurated in March, 1866, in the first number of *Le Parnasse Contemporain*, its collaborators were actually thirty-seven in number, though the germ of it is to be looked for in the earlier meetings of the group of poets who surrounded Catulle Mendès and Louis-Xavier de Ricard, meetings where the ruling spirits were Théophile de Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire and Théodore de Banville, though the Movement's principles were perhaps never carried to more chiselled perfection than by Heredia, in his single but incomparable volume *Les Trophées*, that scanty but glorious sheaf from which not one single ear could be spared.

What precisely were those principles? M. Sully Prudhomme, one of the first thirty-seven writing many years after

the launching of the original venture, explained with admirable brevity the Parnassian aim: "Ce n'étaient pas, à proprement parler, des novateurs. Ils ne prétendaient nullement bouleverser les règles traditionnelles de la versification: au contraire, ils les appliquaient avec une rigueur inflexible. Ce qu'ils visaient, ce n'était pas une réforme, mais une exploitation scrupuleuse des ressources que leur offraient ces règles pour exprimer leurs pensées et leurs sentiments le plus poétiquement possible. . . . Nous avions tous individuellement le même souci d'une facture soignée. . . . L'idée ne vous venait même pas qu'on pût discuter les lois de la poétique traditionnelle. . . . La passion du beau respire dans ces diverses poésies, et les recherches d'une facture qui soit de mieux adaptée à l'idéal individuel, quel qu'en soit le succès, attestent chez l'artiste un noble souci." Pages have been written, pages may be written again on the Parnassian Theory, but it would be difficult to expound its spirit and method more lucidly than this one of its authors has done in these few lines. *La passion du beau, une facture soignée*, these are the leading factors, the first its informing spirit, the second its method: and the result—a rare excellence when, an exquisite subject having been chosen by *la passion du beau*, then *une facture soignée*,—a scrupulous handling, elaboration of the old, tried and accepted resources of poetic art—has wrought, polished, moulded and finished with an incomparable, equally exquisite skill. But, in human things, as the Heraclitean phrase has it, "nothing is but is always becoming." We talk about theories and "schools" as if they were utterly diverse and separate: everywhere, even in the region of poetry, we tend far too much to draw rigidly exclusive lines, for even while we draw them, they are losing their meaning. All round us, in things great and small, actually while we watch change comes in substance or form; the outlines blur and merge, the sound alters, the light shifts, and the present moment slips imperceptibly into the next. Even when, in our heedless fashion, we call things the same, somewhere hidden within us lies consciousness of a difference. Hence, however epoch-making and permanent a theory may seem, the seeds of change are there.

Among the Parnassians were some, notably Stéphane Mallarmé for one, who held the secret of the succeeding School, the *Symboliste*: and neither Parnassian nor Symbolist appeared really for the first time in the nineteenth century. The truth is that, though there be "no new thing under the sun," mankind continually takes up the kaleidoscope of life afresh; and in their perennial making of patterns men sometimes achieve at least new combinations, even though they may fail to realise that something like the latest disposition of factors has occurred before.

In one respect, the Symbolist method differs entirely from the Parnassian, viz. in lending itself far less easily to description or definition. Ferdinand Brunetière mockingly offered to define this School's aim in their own language: "le symbolisme est la réintégration de l'imprécis, ou du fluent des choses, à inscrire dans le comparatif ou le suggestionnant, par l'instrumentation d'un rythme polymorphe, allié d'un verbe ondulatoire jusqu'aux limites incessamment promues du métaphorisme émancipé des triviales usances. . . ."¹ The combined brilliance and injustice of this sally appear if we recall passages of so typical a Symbolist as Henri de Regnier, such as the following:—

Les lointains sont baignés de brumes violettes
Où s'enfonce et se perd la blancheur des chemins
Les contours indécis des choses incertaines
Se fondent dans le soir calme que rien n'émeut ;

or again :—

Au cœur les souvenirs pleurent confusément.
Voici la nuit qui vient et ses folles paniques :
Le vent ne souffle plus, le ramier s'est enfui,
Le jet d'eau se lamente en des plaintes rythmiques,
Et tes yeux grands ouverts me suivent dans la nuit ;

or, once more that beautiful dream picture :—

Et je vous ai rêvée impératrice ou reine
De quelque ancien pays qui n'exista jamais ;
Dans un palais d'où l'on verrait la mer sereine
Où voguer sur des flots aplanis et calmés
Un navire ayant à la proue une Sirène.

¹ *Essais sur la Littérature contemporaine*, p. 133.

In amends for his skilful jest, Brunetière wrote later on : " La nature n'est peut-être qu'un déguisement, où qu'un voile. Qui l'a jamais su ? qui le saura jamais ? . . . Ce qui du moins n'est pas douteux, c'est que rien n'est clair en nous ni en dehors de nous, et que nous sommes de toutes parts environnés d'ombres et de mystère. L'inconnaissable nous étreint : *in eo vivimus, movemur et sumus*. Si nous réussissons parfois à en saisir quelque chose, il est également certain que ce n'est pas en nous bornant à observer la nature ; mais nous y ajoutons, de notre fond à nous, les principes d'interprétation qu'elle ne contient pas. Et comment le pourrions-nous, s'il n'y avait certainement aussi quelque convenance ou quelque correspondance entre la nature et l'homme, des harmonies cachées, comme on disait jadis, un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible ? " ¹

Brunetière might choose to jest brilliantly at the Symbolists' expense, but two phrases in this passage which shew how well he had grasped their purpose and meaning stand out conspicuously : " quelque correspondance entre la nature et l'homme," and " un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible." Just there, lay the *Symboliste* contribution, the attitude of Charles van Lerberghe when he wrote :—

Ne suis-je vous, n'êtes vous moi,
O choses que de mes doigts
Je touche, et de la lumière
De mes yeux éblouis ?
Fleurs où je respire, soleil où je luis,
Ame qui penses
Qui peut me dire où je finis,
Où je commence ? ²

This, though conveyed more definitely and succinctly, is akin to the conviction which Walt Whitman often tried to express, e.g. in the *Song of Myself*, *Passage to India*, and, though in a different vein, in that winning poem, *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. One quotation, from the first of these, must suffice :—

I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the rim
of the farther systems,
Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding
Outward and outward and for ever outward.

¹ *Essais sur la Littérature contemporaine*, p. 139.

² *Le Chanson d'Eve*, Charles van Lerberghe.

There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage.
 If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces,
 were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would
 not avail in the long run,
 We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
 And surely go as much farther and then farther and farther.

Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,
 You must travel it for yourself.

It is not far, it is within reach,
 Perhaps you have been on it since you were born, and did not know,
 Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land.¹

Walt Whitman was a Symbolist, whose reach exceeded his grasp ; but a Symbolist he was, even though he may never so have described himself. A different, singularly beautiful example of the same standpoint occurs in a very recent book of Joseph Campbell—

The mind of man is a door :
 A song will open or close it.

We see clearly and not darkly,
 The clouds have crowned us with mitres of understanding.
 The ferns have set their gold crosiers in our hands.
 We are shepherds of thoughts.

We live for ever.
 For ever through time,
 And through the life that is not time,
 But an endless folding and unfolding.²

When Brunetière writes of our adding the principle of "interpretation" not contained in natural phenomena, no lover of Wordsworth can fail to recall his

discerning intellect of man
 When wedded to this goodly universe.³

Nevertheless, it is not easy to define neatly the Symbolist method. In general, it may be described as the phase of art which deals rather with a thing's inner significance than directly with the thing itself : which aims at the reality lurking hidden beneath a veil, which veil, however, it will not wholly disregard, since, though without the clearly-cut and sharply-lighted lines of the Parnassians, it everywhere still cares something for decoration, for the external and par-

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman, ed. of 1884, p. 72.

² *Earth of Cualann*, Joseph Campbell, p. 15.

³ *The Recluse*.

ticularly for atmosphere. M. Faguet, with his vigorous phrasing, has tried to define Symbolism doubly, by what it is not and by what it is: "Le fond du symbolisme *négativement* c'était l'horreur de la forme nette, lapidaire et lumineuse des Parnassiens. . . . Le fond du Symbolisme *positivement* était le goût de l'indécis, du fuyant, de l'indéterminé, et du clair obscur parce que la vérité et surtout la vérité sentimentale est dans les nuances changeantes 'et aussi indiscernables que le cou de la colombe' comme a dit Renan."¹ The fault of this criticism is its too great tendency to the rigidly compartmental view, that view, which will shut literature and, in particular, poetry into mutually exclusive boxes. M. Faguet seems to forget that Mallarmé, for instance, could forge a link between the Parnassian and Symbolist Schools. To which shall we assign these lines, to which of the two Theories do they owe most?—

J'errais donc, l'œil rivé sur le pavé vieilli.
Quand avec du soleil aux cheveux, dans la rue
Et dans le soir, tu m'es en riant apparue.
Et j'ai cru voir la fée au chapeau de clarté
Qui jadis sur mes beaux sommeils d'enfant gâté
Passait, laissant toujours de ses mains mal fermées
Neiger de blancs bouquets d'étoiles parfumées.

Moreover, when M. Faguet speaks of "l'horreur de la forme nette," he does scant justice to the Symbolists' care for decoration. It is, in fact, impossible to define precisely, still less finally, these poetic theories, for they are neither perfectly stable nor mutually exclusive. Brunetière, as he described the *Symboliste* awareness of "un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible," was thinking of *Symbolisme*, not in its most theoretic—one might say most academic stage—but rather in its later development, a phase such as may be found in the work of Stuart Merrill, who marks the beginning of Symbolism's passage into an art, or attitude beyond its own. Perhaps in this statement: "Cependant, il ne doit pas se contenter comme les Romantiques et les Parnassiens d'une beauté toute extérieure, mais par le symbolisme des formes de beauté il doit suggérer tout l'infini d'une pensée ou d'une émotion qui ne s'est pas encore exprimée," Merrill was underrating the

¹ *Petite Histoire de la Littérature Contemporaine*, pp. 294-5.

Parnassian view as much as he was exaggerating the now generally accepted Symbolist. He was, in fact, carrying Symbolism one stage nearer to Mysticism, to the mood which pierces through, plunges beneath external form, which diving under the outward beauty and decoration, establishes direct contact with the essential, underlying reality. Here again, precise definition, however often attempted, fails: an approximation only is possible; Symbolism proper dealing with that for which a thing stands, Mysticism penetrating to the thing itself.

Thus far, theory has been dealt with here exclusively from the point of view of its nature, its essence; and obviously that comes first in importance. But there remains the question of its expression; since, after all, Poetry must always consist of matter and form. No doubt Mr. Symons was right when he maintained that words in themselves are *symbols*.¹ But, when we speak of "symbolic expression" we mean something subtler, more elusive than this; we require, in the phrase of Comte Goblet d'Alviella, that such symbolism shall be "a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction."

The soul of symbolism is just the conviction of "a harmony between Man and Nature," of that "secret relation between 'sense' and 'intellectual apprehension,'" of which Brunetière speaks: its body is an "intertissued robe of gold and pearl," the gleaming garment which the poet, the seer, weaves out of carefully chosen word and aptly fashioned phrase. This is more easily described than done. Symons saw the complexity of the problem which perhaps accounts for his differing attempts at its solution. For instance, he has described literary symbolism as "a form of expression at best approximate . . . for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness." And then, elsewhere, he makes the admission

¹ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 3. It is worth while to remember that further on in this book, Mr. Symons, in a singularly suggestive passage, claims for words the right to be "things-in-themselves":—"words are living things which we have not created, and which go their way without demanding of us the right to live . . . words are suspicious, not without their malice . . . they resist mere force with the impalpable resistance of fire and water. They are to be caught only with guile or with trust" (pp. 89, 90).

that "we have done much if we have found a recognisable sign." Then, later still, he refers to "the secret of things which is just beyond the most subtle words."

In this intense difficulty of expression, a difficulty which he both recognises and proclaims, lies perhaps the cause of that fleetingness and apparent insubstantiality, that blurred dimness which Brunetière urged as a reproach to *Symbolisme*, and which Regnier exemplified in

Les contours indécis des choses incertaines ;

because it is at least possible that the hesitancy, the apparent dubiety of *Symbolisme* lie not in apprehension so much as in the irremovable limitations of language. Take, for instance, those significant lines of Regnier's poem on Diana the Huntress,—

Et je marchais dans le silence et dans la paix
Qui descendaient sur ces feuillages impossibles,
Sur les sentiers moussus et les gazons épais,

Et j'entendais siffler des flèches invisibles,—

who could find words fitter, more suggestive? Yet the vision transcends the expression, there is a "secret" in it, "just beyond the most subtle words."

Even if it be admitted that Symbolism (wherein it resembles Parnassianism and Mysticism) is not the mark only of a certain era, or definite school, but indigenous in human thought, yet there are long spaces when it seems to disappear; and among poets who are Symbolists, there are varying degrees; few, e.g., in our own literature approach and sustain the symbolism of Ernest Dowson. The very heart of hidden, remote loneliness sobs in these lines:—

In music I have no consolation,
No roses are pale enough for me;
The sound of the waters of separation
Surpasseth roses and melody.

No man knoweth our desolation;
Memory pales of the old delight;
While the sad waters of separation
Bear us on to the ultimate night.

Apprehension beyond the range of possible expression is the stuff of his *Amor Umbratilis*, culminating in the last verse—

Yea, for I cast you, sweet !
 This one gift you shall take :
 Like ointment on your unobservant feet,
 My silence, for your sake.

To expect, when we are dealing with "schools" of poetic thought and method, absolute compartmental clarity, and to demand rigid adherence to definitions is to practise one of those "exclusions" which Voltaire, writing to Vauvenargues, declared to be unworthy of such a man as that soldier-philosopher;¹ and which, therefore, are perhaps unworthy of thinkers, who lesser though they be than he, still care for literature and philosophy single-heartedly, as he did.

There is a further point. M. Merrill, aiming at precision, fell into error. No Parnassian would accept his allegation, already quoted, that they contented themselves with "une beauté toute extérieure." José-Maria de Heredia, one of the original Parnassian band, who rarely missed the *soirées* in the house of Leconte de Lisle, irrevocably disposes of any such charge. No Parnassian exceeded him in Parnassianism. External beauty there certainly is in everything which he wrote; but continually, persistently there is very much besides. Choice amid such a wealth of opportunity is difficult: but since a few lines must suffice here, which could be selected to prove more triumphantly his power of flinging decorative beauty round a poignant instant, or to exemplify his simultaneous appeal to the senses of sound, line and colour, to the intellectual qualities of memory and reflection, to the emotions of fear, awe and grandeur than the sestet of *La Trebbia*?—

Rouissant le ciel noir de flamboiements lugubres,
 A l'horizon où brulaient les villages Insubres,
 On entendit au loin barrir un éléphant
 Et là-bas, sous le pont, adossé contre une arche,
 Hannibal écoutait, pensif et triomphant
 Le piétinement sourd des légions en marche.

The range, depth and content of these wonderful lines are enhanced by comparison with another sonnet, when Heredia might, with truth, be said to confine himself to external things, to be satisfied for the moment with a picture—

¹ " Il appartient à un homme comme vous, Monsieur, de donner des préférences et point d'exclusions " (Voltaire à Vauvenargues, le 15^{ème} Avril, 1743, Œuvres de Vauvenargues ed., Gilbert, vol. ii., p. 252).

C'est alors qu'apparut, tout hérissé de flèches,
 Rouge du flux vermeil de ses blessures fraîches,
 Sous la pourpre flottante et l'airain rutilant,
 Au fracas des buccins qui sonnaient leur fanfare,
 Superbe, maîtrisant son cheval qui s'effare,
 Sur le ciel enflammé, l'Impérator sanglant.

A great, an unforgettable picture, yet lacking the haunting atmosphere, the subtle suggestiveness of the Hannibal sestet.

In the passage where he meted out to the Parnassians such half justice, Stuart Merrill did succeed in imprisoning his own kind of Symbolism in a singularly happy phrase: "La seule Poésie lyrique qui puisse prévaloir est la Poésie Symbolique, qui est supérieure, par la force de l'Idée inspiratrice, à la vaine réalite de la Vie, puisqu'elle n'emprunte à la Vie que celle qu'elle offre d'éternel." These closing words are the kernel of the matter: it is the lasting reality, the durable beauty, the element of the non-transient in life, which, according to Merrill's theory, Symbolism would seize; and here it is that he heralds the coming again of the third of these "schools," the Mystic, the return of that which is as old as Man's thought, and which has appeared just recently with increasing force, though not solely in poetry, in the movement of that perpetual to-and-fro which some men call progress.

It is, then, the underlying significance for which Merrill supremely cares, and which he would fain capture, even in an erotic lyric so picturesque that some might miss its other meaning, in a love-song such as this:—

Mon front pâle est sur tes genoux
 Que jonchent des débris de roses;
 O femme d'automne, aimons nous
 Avant le glas des temps moroses.

Though, here and there a "liaison" poet like Merrill can approximate the one to the other, yet, essentially, the Symbolist and Mystical methods are diverse. On the other hand, the Parnassian method excludes neither, for it, indeed, shuts out nothing save the ugly, the clumsy, the insincere, the blundered.

When all is said and done, these three movements, so obvious in recent years, are less schools, irrevocably fixed by definite choice in a given moment of time, than recurrent and

fluent methods, changing no doubt superficially but abiding in their depths. Perhaps critics more than the makers and seers, need to learn the lesson of catholicity, need to realise that in Poetry there are no hard and fast lines, though these in criticism, good and bad alike, are only too common; and further they need to grasp the fact of the return, the reappearance of this or that method in different eras and places, and they need, above all, to remember not to refuse a place and welcome to a poet solely because he does not chance to conform to the strictest fad of the current mode and moment.

From one point of view, it seems misleading to treat these three theories, the Parnassian, the Symbolist and the Mystical on a level, because the first differs from the other two in at least one important respect. It would not be true to say that the Parnassian deals with *form* and the other two with *content*; but it is true to say that the former cared more extremely for form, aiming at and achieving certain definite methods of style. Moreover, even if the matter of style be put on one side, still the Parnassian theory stands apart. In *la passion du beau*, its disciples shewed that they sought, shall we say?—an object of adulation: while the *raison d'être* and mark of the Symbolists and Mystics is that they are seeking to understand, to unveil, to penetrate, to reach, to apprehend something beyond, occult. This is a more fundamental cleavage than any which could be urged between *la facture soignée* of the Parnassians and the any-or-no form of the others.

Once more, a still more important point, the Symbolist and Mystical attitudes are, in one kind or another, more universal, more enduring. Man has always struggled to break the chains of the merely apparent which bind him, to pass the barriers of the senses, and overstep the limits of time and space. It is not perhaps sufficiently realised that precisely here, much depends on the particular struggler being Christian or non-Christian, including in the latter all who are really, or who as a convenience pose as "pagans," or who are indifferent.

The problem of individuality is unsolved: perhaps by us here and now, it is insoluble. Who can guess the reason why of two children of the same parents, brought up together and

similarly, one will be a cavalier and another a puritan, or one an artist, the other a logician, or one a soldier and the other—to use a recently coined word, an ugly word for a dubious thing—a pacifist, one a mathematician, the other a literary man? Still, these facts of individual affinity remain; and amongst them we must recognise the plain, obvious fact that Philosophy is not the predestined *métier* of every mortal on this earth. Nevertheless, little as it may be realised, some leaning to it is perhaps, in varying degrees—varying indeed down to something very small and unimposing, far more common than most predilections; few of us escape some vagrant touch of it at worst. Rich and poor, educated and illiterate, civilised and savage, in nearly, if not quite all, of us the spectacle of the world around us, the sequences of our individual life, our relations hard or easy with others, raise questions in us. “Philosophy,” Aristotle declared, “was born in wonder.” Those who can live in the world face to face with Nature’s phenomena, her beauties and terrors, her forces, her amenities, her suavities, can live face to face with all that and remain immune from wonder must be dull indeed. Through all times, from all races the question has burst forth, in one form or another,—what is in, behind it all? How did it arise? As Dr. Illingworth declared in the opening pages of his *Divine Immanence*, the relation between spirit and matter is the problem which “lies at the root of all our different theories of life.”

Man is, in fact, faced by two great problems; the relation of himself, his own personal spirit, whatever he likes to call it, to spirit external to him, whether human or divine, and the relation of spirit to matter. It may be an unexplained, individual bias which turns his thoughts either inward to the sequences of his own individual life, or outwards to the contemplation of Nature; but it is a fact of experience that the latter has always, everywhere, caused in many, and in some greater or less degree probably in the majority, a sense of kinship with power, perceived or at least dreamed of, behind or in it. Dr. Illingworth pertinently remarks¹ that in a generation which has outgrown mythology, the conviction

¹ *Divine Immanence*, J. R. Illingworth, p. 22.

of divine immanence persists, and he specifies the nature of this conviction: "the strength of the influence in question is emotional rather than intellectual, and consists in a sense of nearness or communion of one kind or another, with the divine."

One who desires to deal with Poetry from the philosophical side must maintain that this conviction of power behind Nature's manifestations does not always involve the use of the adjective divine, in the Theologian's sense: this is certainly the case in recent centuries. What the Philosopher calls the noumenal in, beneath, behind the phenomenal is the essence and justification of symbolist and mystical poetry alike. But by some poets the noumenal has been treated from the agnostic point of view. The inner as distinct from the outer is to them, as to the rest, a matter of experience, and experience they will not gainsay, however they interpret it: yet, what the nature of the "inner" is, they are inclined to leave undetermined. An interesting example of this is furnished by Mr. Yeats: "I remember that when I first began to write I desired to describe outward things as vividly as possible, and took pleasure, in which there was perhaps a little discontent, in picturesque and declamatory books. And then, quite suddenly, I lost the desire of describing outward things, and found that I took little pleasure in a book unless it was spiritual and unemphatic. I did not then understand that the change was from beyond my own mind, but I understand now that writers are struggling all over Europe . . . against that 'externality' which a time of scientific and political thought has brought into Literature."¹

There, he writes as though the movement against "externality" might be something quite modern and new, whereas the argument urged here is that this perception of the inner as apart from, and greater than, and probably causal of the outer is as old as human thought, recurring perpetually at indeterminate intervals; and that therefore even if the term Symbolist and—though this is less likely—Mystical temporarily drop out, the attitude they represent persists latently or obviously. The Symbolist *school* is rather—if we may keep

¹ *Ideas of Good and Evil*, W. B. Yeats, p. 296.

up the pedagogic simile—a single term or session in an intellectual attitude which is time-long.

When Mr. Forrest Reid, writing of the Symbolist School which he cuttingly accused of finding “its inspiration in the one-sided, bizarre and somewhat perverse genius of Villiers de l’Isle Adam,” said: “it was but a wave that swept up out of obscurity a crowd of disciples who had little other artistic equipment than the ardour of their convictions,”¹ he forgot or ignored the vitality of the conviction which underlies all genuine symbolism and mysticism. That probably it was not forgetfulness on his part is suggested by the following headlong verdict: “The one poet of the first rank who has been connected with the movement, if we exclude Mr. Yeats, is Verlaine, and Verlaine really is no more a Symbolist than Tennyson was. . . . He² was a born poet, and writes very much as a bird sings. He had a beautiful and divine genius, but in his work there is not the slightest indication that he had ever *thought* on any subject whatever.”³

Agreeing profoundly with Mr. John Morley’s dictum—“we are not called upon to place great men of his” (Wordsworth’s) “stamp as if they were Collegians in a class list,” one need not trouble to challenge the remark about poets of the “front rank”; but the passage in its declaration that Tennyson was no Symbolist and that Verlaine never “thought” affords excellent material for the plea urged here, viz. that the essence of Symbolist and Mystical Poetry lies in the perception of the noumenal at the back of the phenomenal.

Why Mr. Reid should find no thought in Verlaine remains inexplicable: what, e.g., are we to make of the following on the hypothesis of absence of thought?—

—Et puis l’orgue s’éloigne, et puis c’est le silence.
Et la nuit terne arrive, et Vénus se balance
Sur une molle nue au fond des cieux obscurs;
On allume les becs de gaz le long des murs,
Et l’astre et les flambeaux font des zig-zags fantasques.
Dans le fleuve plus noir que le velours des masques;
Et le contemplateur sur le haut garde-fou
Par l’air et par les ans rouillé comme un vieux sou

¹ *W. B. Yeats*, by Forrest Reid, p. 61.

² i.e., Verlaine.

³ *W. B. Yeats*, by Forrest Reid, pp. 62–3.

Se penche, en proie aux vents néfastes de l'Abîme.
 Pensée, espoir serein, ambition sublime,
 Tout jusqu'au souvenir, tout s'envole, tout fuit,
 Et l'on est seul avec Paris, l'onde et la Nuit.¹

Those who remember Verlaine's poem on the crucifix in the Church of Saint-Géry at Arras, and specially these lines from it—

On sent qu'il s'offre au Père en toute charité,
 Ce vrai Christ catholique, éperdu de bonté,
 Pour spécialement sauver vos âmes tristes
 Pharisiens naïfs, sincères jansénistes !—²

will hardly agree with the verdict that in his work "there is not the slightest indication that he had ever *thought* on any subject whatever." Nor is it easy to understand how anyone deserving so sweeping a charge could have "beautiful and divine genius."

Critics, however, do not as a rule write down judgments out of sheer vacuity, as one might be tempted to suppose this one had been hazarded. Mr. Reid must surely have meant something; and it may elucidate the whole question a little further to consider what he may have meant. The most probable solution would appear to be that by a verbal confusion he was only expressing clumsily the truth which Mr. Arthur Symons has expounded far more accurately: "Reflection in Verlaine is pure waste; it is the speech of the soul and the speech of the eyes that we must listen to in his verse, never the speech of the reason."³

It is idle to expect the average mass of men and women to be explicit and accurate either in thought or word; something not too far from the mark is all which, as a rule, the majority of us achieve. But writing of Poetry, writing indeed at all on any matter of moment, one should not confuse reason (the faculty of drawing conclusions) with thought, a word which of course includes all these ratiocinative processes, but very much besides, ranging, in its scope, from the dimmest stirrings of wonder up to the intangible regions of speculative reverie, and non-material, non-sensible vision.

¹ *Poèmes Saturniens (Nocturne Parisien)*, Paul Verlaine.

² *Poésies religieuses*, p. 104, Paul Verlaine.

³ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, A. Symons, p. 86.

There is a still further puzzle. Why should Mr. Reid demand thought, as he uses the word, as part of the make-up of the Symbolist in face of this declaration: "As I understand Art, above all the Art of Poetry, it should depend much more upon the natural, though of course cultivated, sensitiveness of the reader than upon his scientific knowledge. . . . But these lines of Mr. Yeats'¹ depend, like the greater part of Blake's writings, altogether upon our proper understanding of what is said; are not, unless we hold the key to them, in the true sense of the word suggestive at all."² This puzzle it seems futile to attempt to solve, unless by the reflexion that, wise and unwise alike, we all make mistakes.

Then there is his other temerarious declaration to be dealt with: "Verlaine really is no more a Symbolist than Tennyson was," which, we must take it, does not mean that both were Symbolists, but precisely equally so, but that neither of them was. There is no doubt a sense in which this might be true, viz. if the words be interpreted to mean that neither was a Symbolist pure and simple, a Symbolist and nothing else. But the plea underlying this chapter is that rigid compartments in poetry are a manufactured bogey of undiscerning critics, and that consequently few if any poets are one thing and *one thing only*. Outside the ballad-monger and impenitent parodist that is surely true?

This, however, is plainly not Mr. Reid's implication: his words are meant quite obviously to be taken in their straightforward sense—as Tennyson was no Symbolist, so Verlaine was no Symbolist.

But is this true? If we discard Brunetière's jesting sneer and retain only from the passage already quoted those two phrases in which he enshrined the essential nature of Symbolism: "quelque correspondance entre la nature et l'homme" and "un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible," then there will be no great difficulty in proving Tennyson's ability to treat matters from the Symbolist point of view. Let us

¹ The lines referred to are from "Michael Robartes bids his beloved to be at peace," p. 25 of *The Wind among the Reeds*—

O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay.

² W. B. Yeats, by Forrest Reid, p. 68.

realise that this condition described by Brunetière is no "pathetic fallacy," no handing on to Nature, viewed as inanimate, the feelings and moods of the human bystander, not that, but a real approach between Nature—in the narrower sense which excludes mortals—and Man; a genuine relation between "sense" and "intelligence."

Surely the following lines, from a poem published as early as the year 1830, breathe the spirit of Symbolism, the kind of atmosphere constant in Regnier and not infrequent in Verlaine—

My very heart faints and my whole soul grieves
At the most rich smell of the rotting leaves,
And the breath
Of the fading edges of box beneath
And the year's last rose.¹

Beneath the vagueness there is an intention of reaching beyond the obvious and material to something intangible but not, for that, the less real.

These lines from Tennyson's prize Poem, *Timbuctoo*, which won him the Chancellor's Medal at Cambridge in 1829—

I know not if I shape
These things with accurate similitude
From visible objects, for but dimly now,
Less vivid than a half-forgotten dream,
The memory of that mental excellence
Comes o'er me, and it may be I entwine
The indecision of my present mind
With its past clearness, yet it seems to me
As even then the torrent of quick thought
Absorbed me from the nature of itself
With its own fleetness,

have surely more than a fancied affinity with that which Henri de Regnier described as

les contours indécis des choses incertaines ?

It is perhaps not unfair when one is trying to shew a poet's qualities to rescue a few lines even from a youthful poem afterwards deliberately suppressed: if so, the following may be quoted as an example of Tennyson's early tendency towards Symbolism—

For him the silent congregated hours,
Daughters of time, divinely tall, beneath

¹ Song: *Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, edited by J. Churton Collins, p. 22.

Severe and youthful brows, with shining eyes,
 Upheld, and ever held aloft the cloud
 Which droops low-hung on either gate of life,
 Both birth and death ; he in the centre fixt
 Saw far on each side through the grated gates
 Most pale and clear and lovely distances.
 He often lying broad awake, and yet
 Remaining from the body, and apart
 In intellect and power and will, hath heard
 Time flowing in the middle of the night
 And all things creeping to a day of doom.¹

In spite of Tennyson's name for this poem, *The Mystic*, yet its dreamy suggestiveness, its care for atmosphere and decoration are rather of Symbolism than of Mysticism proper.

Once more, is there not a touch of the *Symboliste* School's attitude and aim in his *Vision of Sin*?—that very notable poem, which, though in some respects it stands apart and alone, yet could hardly in the early Victorian age have come from any pen but that of the man whom Professor Churton Collins described as "A consummate artist and a consummate master of our language."

The mood lasted intermittently to the end of Tennyson's life : those haunting lines in the *Prologue to General Hamley*—

You came, and look'd and loved the view
 Long-known and loved by me,
 Green Sussex fading into blue
 With one gray glimpse of sea—²

however they may seem superficially or to the casual reader, are to the Sussex-born symbolic : truly for them here is "un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible." But after all, whether or no Verlaine's capacity to "think," or Tennyson's tinge of symbolism be proved, these questions of personal powers and failings must ever, like all personal matters, be limited in interest. A far more fundamental matter is broached by Mr. Reid when, taking Yeats' "I hear the Shadowy Horses" as a peg on which to hang his discourse, he writes the following passage, part of which I have already quoted : "As I understand Art, above all the Art of Poetry, it should depend much more upon the natural, though of

¹ *The Mystic* from Appendix (p. 287) to *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, edited by J. Churton Collins.

² *Tiresias and other Poems*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, p. 155.

course cultivated, sensitiveness of the reader than upon his scientific knowledge. The Scientific Mind cares only for what is actually said, and poetry which depends upon what never can quite be said, makes little or no appeal to it. But these lines of Mr. Yeats¹ depend, like the greater part of Blake's writings, upon our proper understanding of what is said : are not, unless we hold the key to them, in the true sense of the word suggestive at all. The faculties that we must bring to bear upon them are exactly the same faculties that we employ in scientific work. . . . Apart from the beauty of sound we get nothing till we have solved our puzzle, and while we are busy with the solution, we lose even the beauty of sound. The first great truth that the artist must keep before him is that all unnecessary strain upon the reader's attention is so much to the bad, so much sheer waste of a faculty that after all is limited and must relax in one direction when it is too arduously worked in another."²

Mr. Reid's argument is two-sided, it deals with the particular instance of Mr. Yeats' poem, and also makes a general claim. The particular instance shall be considered first.

He objects that the last two lines of this passage from *The Shadowy Horses* are the key to the four preceding ones : and that this key cannot be used until we turn up the note at the end of the volume, and discover that in Irish (and other) mythology the North is the region of night and sleep, the East of dawn and hope, the West of twilight and dream, the South of the meridian sun and passion. In the first place this is not very recondite information ; in the second an intelligent reader could infer it from the poem ; and in the third, if mythology, with all its beauty may never be called in because some people are unacquainted with it, we shall lose much suggestive and exquisite poetry, and, moreover, we shall, logically, be unable to stop at the employment of

¹ The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
The West creeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire :
O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay.

The Wind among the Reeds, p. 24.

² *W. B. Yeats*, by Forrest Reid, pp. 67-8.

myths, since we could not draw the line at one department of knowledge only. Besides, then, the futility of this charge against Yeats, there is the unsoundness of Mr. Reid's general plea that poetry should never ask us to solve a problem.

His whole attitude to the Symbolists seems to be that they were first and foremost a clique, and that all cliques are abomination; and secondly, that even among cliques they were an inferior kind, indeed, in one place, he writes of "the almost pitiful exiguity of that pale and bloodless world in which the Symbolists moved." Yet what could be more narrowly "cliquish" than his contention that Poetry may not legitimately make any demand on the reader's knowledge? On this principle, much of the world's greatest poetry would be ruled out. To talk of "unnecessary strain on the reader's attention" is to beg the question with an ambiguous phrase. With a wave of his critical hand, Mr. Reid sweeps into contempt and oblivion the infinite variety of poetic conception, the infinite variety of human understanding to which how many of the great poets appeal. His canon of Art, even though spelt with a capital A, is deplorably meagre and narrowing. His demand is peculiarly inept in the case of Symbolist Poetry which deliberately appeals to the reader's knowledge, if not of that which is unveiled, at least to his knowledge that something lies hidden, something to which the poet seeks to penetrate, just that he may unveil it. Nor is the position bettered when Mr. Reid gives to rhythm that which he has denied to understanding: "Rhythm is there to induce in the reader a mood which is not in itself the subject of the poem, but the evocation of which is necessary before the poem can come to life in his imagination."¹ While on the side of meaning this passage is none too clear, it appears to attribute excessive power to sound.

This, however, is not the end of the matter. Symbolism has to do with man in relation to nature, but it does not stop there. Man stands in the midst, on one side of him nature, on the other GOD. To the non-Christian, Symbolism may deal with the inner, intimate relation between man and physical nature and there it may end. But for the Christian, such set

¹ *W. B. Yeats*, by Forrest Reid, p. 69.

limits, such rigid ramparts do not exist. To him, when he is really instructed, and when, further, he has carried his instruction practically into this hard, strife-torn, bewildering world, and so has, more or less effectively, changed theory into practice, all material things grow symbolic of the non-material.

In her Seven Sacraments, the Church uses the familiar "creaturely" things—water, oil, light,—

the sheaf, the grape
That feed His man—the bread the wine,

in a spiritual, a non-material way, so that "changed from glory to glory," they bring life, health, salvation.

Further, though on a lower plane than these, the Church as a whole, and the individual Christian in his more limited sphere, see in other material things the fleeting gleam of the hidden Presence of GOD; *Vere Tu es Deus absconditus*. Nor in this wonderful order does anything exist in isolation—

thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.

So it comes about that whether or no all are aware of it the natural course of the every-day world we live in hides a further meaning:—

And what want I of prophecy,
That at the sounding of thy station
Of thy flagrant trumpet, see
The seals that melt, the open revelation?—

cried Francis Thompson to

the incarnated light

of the Sun, who, shining in his strength, prefigured a Greater than he. Down the ages, ever recurring testimony to this truth is plain: these facts were as manifest to Isaiah as to the tempest-tossed poet of our own day, while Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., reminds us that in

le moyen âge énorme et délicat

S. Francis, in the *Speculum Perfectionis*,¹ universalised this Sacramentalism of Nature: "Every creature cries out 'GOD

¹ Cap. 118.

has made me on account of thee, O Man.'"¹ So the little Poor Man said.

It is obvious that Christian Symbolism will reach further and embrace more than any purely materialistic symbolism can. The partial decay of faith in the Christian Religion in recent decades may account for certain features—a meagreness, a dryness, a spiritual poverty,—in the poetry of these years. This train of thought, however, may be postponed to make room for an inquiry which grows naturally out of my statement at the beginning that the three Movements,—Parnassian, Symbolist and Mystical, have dominated English and French Poetry during the last seventy years, and also out of the argument underlying all which has been said here, viz. that these theories are not peculiar to any one place or era. As a matter of fact, is it not true that for centuries we can find them periodically and recurrently operative, sometimes in close proximity as in recent times, sometimes more or less singly, or in isolation?

As I have already urged, Parnassianism differs from Symbolism and Mysticism in being more "external": also, in an extreme form, it is less frequent. The Parnassian Movement of the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century, was but the acute recognition of a fundamental requisite in all genuine poetry, viz. beauty of form. In the hands of that Paris coterie, *la passion du beau* was elaborated, dwelt upon, cherished till it developed certain marks which distinguished it as a theory. But the Parnassians' general regard for beautiful form was, after all, only an increased degree of an element vital to Poetry; it was no new doctrine, no entirely novel way of regarding men, thought and things.

This accentuated emphasis was rendered more impressive by the French genius which lends itself less unready to expression in a "School" of thought or art than English genius ever can or will. Your Englishman is so immovably himself, his individual self, as Anatole France recognised, when, writing that prophetic sketch of a "socialised" Europe, he included England, ostensibly revolutionised, but with all her most native and characteristic ways and institu-

¹ *The Romanticism of S. Francis*, by Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., p. 59.

tions retained and pushed into the supposedly new and universal system; a spectacle as comic as probable.

Perhaps the poets of "the Nineties" approximated to a "school" more nearly than any others in the long tale of English Literature, yet of them, by one of them, it has been written: "What was the matter with our critical faculty in the 'nineties'? Perhaps our criticism had gone stale. Literature—and criticism—had become too much of a habit. We were always writing about each other—a somewhat ridiculous thing it seems to me now."¹ The coterie method is somehow an exotic in England.

For all this, Parnassianism is less unique than some have seemed to suppose, although it certainly is less frequently recurrent than the other two methods. Its general aim was the sound one of wedding perfect matter to perfect form. Walter Pater once advocated just that in a phrase which a Parnassian could hardly better: "The one word for the one thing, the one thought amid the multitude of words, terms that might just do: the problem of style was there."² Indeed his whole Essay on Style is not only a plea for this, but an example of it, yet surely no one ever called him a Parnassian.

Two other characteristics distinguished the school in particular, the more important being its insistence on vision, actual sight, *la chose vue*. It signifies not what the subject is, it may be this or that; but whatever it be, that clear-sightedness must not be blurred or dimmed: the thing to be conveyed must be given with photographic sharpness, in the precisely right light, without the smallest trace of indefiniteness. If the subject matter be something "seen," then the reader is left in no state of doubt that it was seen, just so, just then: the poet will have chosen the apt and perfect, the pointed, lit, edged words, sharp like the original vision, and withal beautiful in themselves. But this again, in the end of the passage already quoted, Pater advocated, when he wrote: "the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within." As he writes this, so descriptive of the Parnassian

¹ *The Middle Years*, by Katharine Tynan, p. 128.

² *Appreciations*, by Walter Pater, p. 27.

theory and practice, there is no trace of a suggestion, there, or, I think, elsewhere in his writings that he had *Le Parnasse* ever so faintly in mind : a fact which helps to prove the plea that they made a school out of a general principle. Sully Prudhomme lends colour to this plea when he writes : " L'idée ne nous venait même pas qu'on pût discuter les lois de la poétique traditionnelle." Their distinction lay less in kind than in degree ; while with the Symbolists and Mystics, the difference is in kind. That the Parnassian excelled in cameo-like, clear-cut vision, no one who remembers, e.g. the following stanzas of Leconte de Lisle will deny :—

La nuit multipliait ce long gémissement.
Nul astre ne luisait dans l'immensité nue,
Seule, la lune, pâle, en écartant la nue,
Comme une morne lampe oscillait tristement.

Mond muet, marqué d'un signe de colère,
Débris d'un globe mort au hasard dispersé ;
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l'océan polaire.¹

Nevertheless, they can be matched outside their own borders. The impression in these lines is of a scene accurately and completely visualised and then recorded in irreplaceable words : may not as much be said of this ?—

The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean ; and beyond
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,
In headlands, tongues and promontory shapes
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared
To dwindle, and give up his majesty
Usurped upon far as the eye could reach.²

Yet Wordsworth was dead before *Le Parnasse* was born.

The other somewhat more technical but not less marked characteristic is the Parnassian " last line " : sometimes the very last to which the whole poem has worked up, but not seldom the last line of each stanza as often with Leconte de Lisle, or Frédéric Bataille : this poem of the latter may serve as an instance :—

¹ *Poèmes Barbares*, " Les Hurleurs."

² *The Prelude*, Bk. xiv.

Il fait froid ce soir
 Le ciel est tout noir ;
 C'est l'ombre
 Qui m'ensevelit
 Comme dans un lit
 Très sombre.

Par le brouillard gris,
 Le chauve-souris
 Rapide
 Devant moi sans bruit
 Glisse dans la nuit
 Humide.

Son aile parfois
 Pareille à des doigts,
 M'effleure ;
 Le cœur plein d'émoi,
 Sans savoir pourquoi,
 Je pleure.

O regrets d'exil !
 Les lèvres d'Avril
 Sont closes,
 L'amour est défunt . . .
 Adieu le parfum
 Des roses !¹

Here, as in the perhaps better-known poem of Leconte de Lisle, *Le Soir d'un Bataille*, this culminating line, recurring so frequently, fraught with heavy sound and significance, falls on the waiting ear and expectant mind with extraordinary effect, like a minute gun, or passing bell.

But neither is this mark strictly confined to the Parnassians. Long before them, in the *Elegy*, Thomas Gray had shewn the power of that weighty last line. Earlier still, this time in erotic verse, Thomas Carew, in one of the loveliest songs in English speech, had used it most effectively :—

Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
 When June is past, the fading rose ;
 For in your beauty's orient deep
 These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Ask me no more whither doth haste
 The nightingale, when May is past ;
 For in your sweet dividing throat
 She winters and keeps warm her note.

If anyone urge that England at any rate has not produced a volume comparable to Heredia's *Les Trophées*, that much

¹ *Nouvelles Poésies*, Frédéric Bataille.

may be admitted. Yet the following sonnet, written by a Newdigate Prizeman and Craven Fellow, who fell fighting on and for the ensanguined soil of France, leads us to think that but for the fortune of war, England might have come to possess a series of Sonnets, in a similar vein, not unworthy to challenge comparison with the work of Leconte de Lisle or Heredia :—

Thus said Theognis : " There are thoughts that dwell
Within us, thoughts with many-coloured wings,
That make lament for life and human things."
That surely was a heavenly grain that fell
Among the seeds of perishable rhyme ;
And many men of after years who light
Upon that starry saying glittering bright
Across the arid wilderness of time,
Shall clean forget the hard old oligarch,
His bitter words and galling poverty,
And the long reaches of the years that roll
Between his life and ours : and only see
A gleam of beauty kindled in the dark,
The sudden flicker of a kindred soul.¹

That last line is in the lineal Parnassian descent.

A collection might be made, down the centuries, of English verse, a small one perhaps, but comparable to the work of the French *Parnasse*. Those already mentioned should be in it, and, among the rest, William Watson's *Night on Curbar Edge*, Yeats' *When You are Old and Grey*, and possibly his *Had I the Heavens' Embroidered Cloths*, and Elroy Flecker's *In Phœacia*.

Still there would be a difference, for the English volume would not be the work of a couple of decades, but a gleaning from the Ages, for while the French can and do thus take a fundamental principle and turn it into the Motto of a school, your obstinately individualised Englishman never will.

Yet even Englishmen, confronted with a Theory like that underlying Symbolism, grow less unaware of something in the nature of a Movement ; probably because Symbolism is a mode of apprehension primarily, and only secondarily, if so much, a matter of expression, and so is less easily turned into a passing phase. This mode of apprehension, like *la passion du beau*, is indigenous in human nature ; and being less dependent on expression than Parnassianism, it recurs more frequently, appearing, culminating, and then seeming to

¹ *Beginnings*, by Roger Heath, p. 39.

pass, but only for a while. In a different place and hour it comes again, flourishes to the zenith and fades.

Life, to some of us, seems more like a flux to and fro than a continuous onward process, and Life's Movements are the great moments in that flux as Maeterlinck has said in one of the most luminous passages in one of the most suggestive of his essays, *Le Réveil de l'Ame*: " Il y a dans l'histoire un certain nombre de périodes analogues, où l'âme, obéissant à des lois inconnues, remonte pour ainsi dire à la surface de l'humanité et manifeste plus directement son existence et sa puissance. . . . Il semble qu'en ces moments, l'humanité ait été sur le point de soulever un peu le lourd fardeau de la matière. Il y règne une sorte de soulagement spirituel, et les lois de la nature les plus dures et les plus inflexibles fléchissent cà et là. Les hommes sont plus près d'eux-mêmes, et plus près de leurs frères ; ils se regardent et s'aiment plus gravement et plus intimement. Ils comprennent plus tendrement et plus profondément, l'enfant, les femmes, les animaux, les plantes et les choses. Les statues, les peintures, les écrits qu'ils nous ont laissés ne sont peut-être pas parfaits ; mais je ne sais quelles grâces secrètes y demeurent à jamais vivantes et captives . . . et l'on trouve partout, à côté de la vie ordinaire, les traces ondoyantes d'une autre vie qu'on ne s'explique pas." ¹

The symbolic method is neither old nor new, or rather it is truer to say that it is both, since it is perpetually periodic in human thought. The Chorus, to take an example from early times, in Euripides' *Bacchæ*, which heralds the coming of Dionysos, is undeniably full of most beautiful sense imagery. But the outer is the symbol of that which is hidden : the imagery suggests but does not present the real reality. Escaping apprehension and eluding expression are hints of irresistible power, immaculate purity, love which will take no denial.

To pass from early Greece to modern Belgium, it is a commonplace of criticism to claim Maeterlinck as a *Symboliste*. He is so, not because the senses convey little to him, not because the material world does not attract him, for his senses

¹ *Le Trésor des Humbles*, M. Maeterlinck, pp. 29 et seq.

are alert and the world very close: but because he too, especially in his earlier work, is immeasurably aware of that which he describes so well: "à côté de la vie ordinaire, les traces ondoyantes d'une autre vie qu'on ne s'explique pas." Who having ever seen the young Pelléas, standing in the dim, mysterious half-light before his aged father, having watched him tense there, torn between his obvious every-day duty to stay and welcome his brother home, and the not less imperious call to respond to his dying friend's appeal, can forget the impression of overwhelming supernatural force, of unseen yet constraining influence, which irrevocably grips these struggling mortals as Pelléas sobs—

"sa lettre est si triste qu'on voit la mort entre les lignes."

"Voit"; oh yes, but not with bodily vision. In the subtler, still more poignant play *L'Intruse*, at the tragedy's close, when Death has stolen into the house and has carried off its chief treasure, the old blind grandfather wails:—

Où allez-vous ? où-allez vous ? Elles m'ont laissé tout seul !—

and there descends on us a horror of loneliness far transcending any material solitude. A bereft void yawns black and fathomless: misery pierces the soul as that cry dies into nothingness.

Lying between these extremes of time is a more familiar but not less illustrative instance in *Macbeth*, though Shakspeare in all that mass of criticism which has accumulated round him and his works is not frequently reckoned among the Symbolists. Yet, he would not have been himself had he lacked all touch of this immortal quality.

The colloquy between the guilty husband and the guiltier wife has been followed by Lady Macbeth's departure to

gild the faces of the grooms withal,

Macbeth being left alone with himself. Suddenly, in the half-light, the strained silence is broken, appallingly broken, by the knocking within. Shakspeare, with true dramatic insight of that rare kind which appraises atmosphere precisely, drowns the sense of material sound in the monition of the moral sense. The actual knock symbolises Fate's undelayable approach,

it is a sound of doom, a sound which in the common trite phrase is the beginning of the end, and that end relentless, inevitable. Macbeth, not irrevocably evil, cries wildly :—

Whence is that knocking ?
How is't with me, when every noise appals me ?
What hands are here ? ha ! they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand ? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

Then, Lady Macbeth who, so Shakspeare would have us realise, is no semi-theatrical, semi-well-intentioned and easily-led sinner like her husband, but a clear-eyed imperious woman, who sins not deludedly but deliberately, not half-heartedly but single-mindedly, returns. Again the knocking sounds across the stage : yet her entrance has changed the whole atmosphere :—

I hear a knocking
At the south entry : retire we to our chamber :
A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then ?

The very sound which just now stopped the pulsing of our hearts' blood and chilled us to the bone is turned to triviality. Yet Shakspeare will not allow the Tragedy of Terror to pass on so light, so false a note. True, the former things are driven away by this nonchalant woman ; the guilty man is even momentarily relieved from the awful weight, but he is not, cannot be, restored. As the knocking sounds for the third, last time, his own fear, his wife's levity alike pass. Shakspeare leaves us in a lower-keyed more ordinarily human setting, as Macbeth's groan of vain regret breaks upon the night—

Wake Duncan with thy knocking ! I would thou could'st !

Outside the Plays, a single instance must suffice here : it shall be the wonderful picture which opens the CVIth Sonnet :—

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic Soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
Can yet the lease of my true world control.

This great image of some vast withdrawn Watcher, brooding over this earth, has after many generations an analogue in the last stanza of Verhaeren's *La Nuit*. With his characteristically apt and sharp imagery this great Poet has described the

coming down of darkness upon a wide champaign, whose scattered lakes glimmer under the starlight like Death's pale shrouds. Then he adds this quatrain, awful and mysterious,

Et telle, sur ses coins, et ses salles funébres,
Toute entière bâtie en mystère, en terreur
La nuit paraît le noir palais d'un empereur
Accoudé, quelque part, au loin dans les ténèbres.¹

What are images like these but Symbolism?—Poetry lifting "the veil from the hidden beauty of the world," making "familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."² Here indeed we find "à côté de la vie ordinaire, les traces ondoyantes d'une autre vie qu'on ne s'explique pas."

While Mysticism is fairly easy to define, Symbolism, though many have attempted the task, is not. Sometimes an overstatement illuminates a difficulty. May we then in differentiating the two plead that while the essence of Mysticism is not only awareness of but union with the Veiled Presence behind the phenomenal world, the condition of Symbolism is rather a consciousness of Something, Someone behind to which (to whom) it cannot penetrate: an effort to express the unapprehended and unattainable in terms of that which it, at any rate, partially knows and grasps, and therefore—here the exaggeration enters—the condition of Symbolism is an endeavour to express something unknown but dimly guessed at in words whose inadequacy and possible irrelevance cannot be precisely gauged. The plea urged here is that these theories are not the property of any particular time, or set of people, nor of any one all his time. Though Shakspeare occasionally used Symbolist methods, yet Mr. Flecker could declare with truth: "It is Shakespeare who was the great Parnassian, for he was interested in Man, not in any narrow theories of Man."³ The XIIth Sonnet might serve as an example.

Mystical Poetry is a vast subject requiring volumes to itself. Here it seems more useful to conclude with some brief consideration of poetry which seems often to lie between

¹ *Poèmes*, Emile Verhaeren, p. 198. See above, p. 87.

² *Defence of Poetry*, P. B. Shelley.

³ In a letter, dated Montana-sur Sierre, Dec. 15, 1913, published in the *Poetry Review* (p. 265), Sept.—Oct., 1917.

Symbolism and Mysticism, poetry as difficult to classify exactly as Ireland herself is, that land which somehow always escapes from the comity of nations.

The most careless reader of Irish Poetry can hardly miss the sense of the enchantment of Nature which runs through it, a quality which may be indigenous in the Irish Gael, or a relic of the old Pre-Christian religion, an alternative which is possibly one of words but not facts. It may, however, be the product of the wedding of the Celtic genius to the spirit of Christianity

Before S. Patrick converted the Irish, their own native philosophy, known as *Ecna*, was, so we are assured, wisdom of a general rather than of a specialised kind; a theory worked up by one watching the unrolling of Life panoramically, more than the creation by a man or men fain to furnish their fellows with a system of recipes for making the best, the practicably, comfortably, even commercially best of life, as it might come, one day after another; of the last method the Irish have always recked little. Just in this region the unique achievement occurred, if, as some claim, it really be true that in Ireland Christianity actually succeeded in a kind of fusion with all which was best and truest in the elder wisdom, a fusion of the spiritual and intellectual which has flickered will-o'-the-wisp-wise before the eyes of many men of divers races, men having the truly philosophical, the "synoptic" temper. Yet, it must be admitted, that this is only an opinion; others maintain that the Christian Church did its best to extrude and destroy the older cults, the "polydemonism" as Mr. Arthur Ua Clerigh, an exponent of this second view, calls it."¹ It is interesting, when considering the Irish attitude to Nature, to realise that the oldest Gaelic oath known is one by the most striking of all the natural elements. Mr. Ua Clerigh, quoting from the *Táin*, thus renders it—

I will not go without securities

Without the sun and moon

Together with the sea and land,—²

¹ *The History of Ireland*, by Arthur Ua Clerigh, ch. xii.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

and further he declares that the Church, disapproving this, contrived after the establishment of Christianity in Ireland, that the oath should run, "I swear by the oath of my people."

While it is possible that this may be a curious instance of rejecting a form to keep a substance, in the hope of pleasing everybody, yet it is arguable that we have here an indication that the Church was less hostile than he thinks, and was willing to retain of Ecna all which was not actually destructive of Christianity, a theory to which Miss Eleanor Hull leans. Perhaps forgetting Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola, Adam of S. Victor, S. Ambrose, S. John Damascene, and the *Salve Festa Dies* from the York and Sarum Processionals,—for, however loosely the ambiguous term "Middle Ages" be used, it must include some of those—she declares that to the Middle Ages "the 'world' from which the Saint must flee is . . . the actual, visible earth, its hills and trees and flowers and the beauty of its human inhabitants that are in themselves a danger and a snare."¹ But she claims that "the Irish monk showed no such inclination, suffered no such terrors. His joy in nature grew with his loving association with her moods. He refused to mingle the idea of evil with what GOD had made so good."²

Though she be too oblivious of other nations' love of nature, she at any rate shews that Irish Christianity retained the ancient love of this actual beautiful world.

It is easy to prove the Christian Irishman's sense of a Presence in Nature, his awareness that GOD is hidden there, *Vere Tu es Deus absconditus* as the writer of the poem quoted below shews. The primitive Irish, the fact is well known, had a passion for travelling. Columban, in the Monastery of Bangor on Ulster's eastern coast, passed a contented youth, but seized at the age of forty-two with the wander-hunger, he journeyed away through Gaul and Switzerland, finally, in 613, founding the Monastery of Bobbio, not far from Pavia. Previously during a stay of some three years on the shores of Lake Constance, he had left companions there, one of whom, Gallus, in 614, founded a monastery for Irishmen on the

¹ *The Poem-Book of the Gael*, by Eleanor Hull, p. xx.

² *Ibid.*

heights above the Lake. In time it rose to great fame as not only a home of sanctity, but also of learning: as a home of MSS., the work of its "copying-school" became widely known. It is from the margin of a copy of Priscian the Grammarian, preserved in this monastery of S. Gall, that Miss Hull took *The Blackbird*, of which she gives the following translation:—

High trees close me round,
Far from the ground the blackbird sings,
Trilling it chants its lay
Above my well-lined book to-day.

In its soft veil of grey
The wayward cuckoo calls aloud;
Within my wall of green
My God shrouds me, all unseen.

It would seem that Irishmen, whether people call them "poly-demonists" or Christians, are aware of the Sacramental symbolic realities of Nature. Theorists will always write from their own point of view. Which of us, possessing one, can do otherwise? An unbiassed person is as impossible as undesirable, undesirable because nothing could exceed such a creature's dulness. Out of our prejudiced and biassed views, Truth may emerge; here, our bias records a virtue which our otherwise-eyed neighbour never saw, and there, a vice. We are wisest perhaps when we shake up the theories together, let the scum drop to the bottom, and take the clear liquid at the top for our nearest possible approach to truth.

Some day, if the vaunted spread of Education does not strain out too much Individuality, we may learn to appraise views, not to destroy them. Some day, remembering that he who will not risk making a mistake, makes nothing, we may learn to barter some of our so-called accuracy for suggestion and stimulus. After all, in many regions, to-day's information is gone to-morrow, dissipated by the advent of a fresh-comer with later news. But to-day's *criticism* of yesterday's Wisdom is not so easily swept aside: especially if yesterday contained any trace of prophecy or insight into veiled things. This is no slight on Truth: it is only recognition that in Philosophy and Literature, fact, sheer, bare happening, as it may present itself to a single spectator is not, necessarily and

always, the main factor in the whole problem, may even, left to itself alone, chance to be sterile. This is a plea for wholeness, for realisation of the truth that Reason, whoever be the reasoner, will not avail by itself, but must make some place and scope for the less-analysable contributions of Will and Heart ; thought being greater than reason. It is in this larger region where all human capacities meet in the big word *thought*, that differences count for so much.

All intelligent rational beings agree that two straight lines cannot enclose a space : mathematical propositions are the happy meeting-ground of normal reasoners. But if we discuss the *quality* of lines, their beauty or ugliness, we have gone beyond reason to our other powers, and then we differ endlessly, irremediably. While we may agree intellectually, we differ incalculably over æsthetic, moral and spiritual things. Those of us who believe that there is in the Irish Gael something fundamental wedding him peculiarly to wild nature, and that Christianity did not radically alter this, need not be disturbed by a contrary view, such, e.g. as S. Patrick's, when he wrote rather sweepingly : *Autem Hiberione qui nunquam notitiam Dei habuerunt, nissi idula et immunda usque nunc coluerunt.*¹ Though it seemed so to him, and though perhaps, if he was to carry through his task wholeheartedly, it was necessary that it should so seem to him, the Maker of him and them may have seen the primitive Irish in some other guise than that of mere crude, blind idolators ; those primitive men, who in the most ancient of their extant writings, a poem coeval with the dawn of Christianity in Ireland, sang thus of the Poet's inspiration :—

I spring from the heel of a wise man,
From the meeting place of wisdom I come forth ;
From the place where goodness dwells serene.
From the red sunrise of the dawn I come,
Where grow the nine hazels of poetic art.
From the wide circuits of splendour
Out of which, according to their judgment, truth is weighed,
There is a land where righteousness is instilled
And where falsehood wanes into twilight.
There is a land of varied colours,
Where poems are bathed anew.²

¹ " But in Ireland, they who never had the knowledge of God, but only worshipped idols and unclean things until now " (Confessio Sancti Patricii Episcopi, § 41).

² *The Poem-Book of the Gael*, p. 53.

The question remains, has this mood passed, or is it still inalienably there in Irish Poetry? One recent poet, Seumas O'Sullivan, hints at its passing. In the thought-provoking lines prefixed, in 1912, to his collected *Poems*, he half suggests that the newer race of poets offer wares rather different from their forefathers; he hazards the guess:—

it may be our sadder hearts
Have dealt in more enchanted marts
Than those old singers, and our eyes
Have gathered costlier merchandise.
Witness if in our songs there be
For that fierce olden ecstasy,
For that old singing wild and brave
Magic of wood and wind and wave,
For old high thoughts that clashed like swords
A wisdom winnowed from light words.

When the music of these lines has died away we may find ourselves asking what they really mean. Well, their significance must surely turn mainly on interpretation of the adjective *light*, which, at first sight, seems to attenuate the meaning unduly, for certainly the easy temptation to hope that light might somehow be allied to lit, only comes to be put aside. In its ordinary sense, light seems to carry a measure of disappointment. Yet surely the reference must be to the intrinsic though often forgotten or slighted value of language. It would be not unlike Irish "perversity" to insist to an age prone to scoff at "mere words put in the place of real things," on the unique potentiality of language as a thing in itself; and the only thing, save his systems of thought, which man can be said to have created. Even his philosophies he could hardly have constructed, much less remembered and transmitted, if he had not first bethought himself of the device of language. For in that material world of whose "reality" sensible people are so sure, man is nothing of a maker. J. S. Mill, in a well-known and entertaining chapter of that Amalgam which he entitled *Principles of Political Economy*, sprang on the orderly ears of his fellow Victorians the upsetting truth that they did not make anything—not even that massive furniture associated with their name, to which, no doubt, some yet unborn age will return as to an artistic find—save *convenience* (or inconvenience according to the point of

view), reminding them that the utmost they could do was to move material commodities from places of uselessness to posts of utility.

Language and philosophy, with poetry and music, man, on the other hand, really has *made* : therefore even fringes of speech may have their immutable value, even "light words" may harbour and veil wisdom, at any rate in the estimation of these unpractical, feather-headed Irish. Taking, then, the one line, of the above passage, which serves our present purpose, let us ask, Is the

Magic of wood and wind and wave

more present in the old than in the new? To the Irish Gael. Is Nature still enchanted? Has he, soon or late, sold that birthright, that heritage, for any mess of pottage whatever? The answer surely is, No : and O'Sullivan himself answered it in the negative when he wrote such a poem as *The Sheep*.

Perhaps Mr. Yeats, for all his beauty, has been a little too rashly accepted in England as the norm of modern Irish Poetry. In fact he differs widely from himself, not seldom. No doubt such a passage as—

on the dove-gray edge of the sea
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with bridle of findrinny,
And like a sunset were her lips
A stormy sunset on doomed ships :
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
But down to her feet white vesture flowed
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery,

fell with a novel ring on the ears of English readers. But it is not true Symbolism however often it may be claimed as such. It is a cataloguing of decorative effects, rather in the fashion of Lord de Tabley when he gave rein to his imagination in the *Circe* poems. Apart from any other criticism, the image of the sunset cannot be accepted : the first line perhaps might be, and we can admit that the next one—

A stormy sunset on doomed ships,

is a great, even a startling, image. But applied to a woman's mouth it surely is meaningless?

If any one will urge that the four closing lines are symbolic, a critic may perhaps be forgiven for asking, Of what? The poem is too elaborately laboured to be symbolic. Yeats confessed in a co-temporary letter: "The finishing of 'Oisín' is a great relief—never has any poem given me so much trouble—making me sleepless a good deal, it has kept me out of spirits and nervous. It seems better now than when I was working it out. . . . Two days ago, it seemed the worst thing I ever wrote."¹ Had it been less highly elaborated, less manufactured and filed, it might have been more significant, Symbolism, in essence, being not a question of workmanship, but of a point of view, of a vision, of an instantaneous flash, of a sudden response. The friend to whom he addressed this letter perceived the Poet's temptation to over-elaborate. Speaking of his father, she wrote: "Mr. Yeats sometimes did marvellous things . . . especially if he was not given time to over-paint, as he was inclined to do, perpetually adding to and altering his pictures, as Willie has done to his poems, to their ultimate loss."²

Almost all the contents of his beautiful book, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, poems like *The Cap and Bells*, *The Host of the Air*, *Into the Twilight* are truer symbolism. Those plain bluish grey boards, linen-backed, held a treasure which the decorative, gold-symbolled covers of his more elaborately and meticulously finished works promised but hardly contained. Trying to be symbolic would seem to be a self-defeating process, rather like trying to sleep, or trying to like people you do not.

Those who would find Nature Enchanted must turn to Padraic Colum, to Joseph Campbell, to Seumas O'Sullivan, to the golden-phrased A. E., turn to such haunting, haunted verse as—

Twilight fallen white and cold,
Child in cradle, lamb in fold;
Glimmering thro' the ghostly trees
Gemini and Pleiades.
Wounds of Eloim,
Weep on me!

¹ *The Middle Years*, by Katharine Tynan, p. 38.

² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Black-winged vampires flitting by,
Curlews crying in the sky ;
Grey mists wreathing from the ground,
Wrapping rath and burial mound.
Wounds of Eloim,
Weep on me !

Heard like some sad Gaelic strain,
Ocean's ancient voice in pain ;
Darkness folding hill and wood,
Sorrow drinking at my blood.
Wounds of Eloim,
Weep on me !—¹

Without the faintest trace of being sought after or dragged in, these beautiful, wholly true images follow one another : the total effect is of immediate contact with sacrificial pain shrined in an unforgettable setting.

The incurable melancholy of the Irish Gael has ever puzzled the more rationally-minded Englishman. But now, in these dark hours of the European War, when the complacent surface of things is stripped off, and civilisation proves scarcely so much as a thin veneer, barely having covered realities of the crudest horror and ugliness, when all which is merciful, good and sincere seems unaccountably gripped and hampered by some intangible but evil and bestial power, now, at length, this sacrificial grief, this redeeming pain, this sense of tears in human things, may come to seem the sanest mood of all : and those who perhaps wondered at the infrangible influence of that alien Celtic standpoint, who stood amazed because, even in the first decade of the century—when Materialism seemed on the point of triumphing over every spiritual quality and thing—the poetry of the Irish School, in that unsympathetic hour, had about it a deeper, intenser, more valid reality than the rest, may now understand that though it was not, as it was not infrequently called, Mysticism, yet it was Symbolism ; and, strong in its conviction of “un rapport secret du sensible et de l'intelligible,” had its hand on the sheet anchor of all wholesome human life.

Examples might be multiplied from Joseph Campbell's *Mountainy Singer*, but the one given is among the most typical. His recent book, *Earth of Cualann*, does not lend

¹ *The Mountainy Singer*, by Seosamh MacCathmhaoil, p. 45.

itself so well to quotation; it needs to be taken altogether, with the illustrations. The Poem in it most separable from the rest has been quoted already.¹ The real "begetter" of the recent Gaelic School, he who confessed: "The greatest pleasure I find in life is discovering new, young poets,"² is A. E., Mr. George Russell.

Why, from the volume of his *Collected Poems*, he omitted the lines which prefaced at any rate the first edition of *The Divine Vision* remains a mystery to one of his readers. Is it permissible to quote some few of these enchanted, enchanting lines, so unhappily suppressed?—

When twilight flutters the mountains over
The faery lights from the earth unfold.

The child of earth in his heart grows burning,
Mad for the night and the deep unknown;
His alien flame in a dream returning
Seats itself on the ancient throne.

When twilight over the mountains fluttered
And night with its starry millions came,
I too had dreams: the songs I have uttered
Come from this heart that was touched by the flame.

Could a more notable instance be found of this kind of utterance, Ireland's monopoly, which is neither quite Symbolism nor quite Mysticism, which is not purely Philosophy nor Religion, but is, what I have already called it, Nature Enchanted?

Who, that has read them once, can ever forget some of these golden, inspired, visionary lines?—

Twilight, a timid fawn, went glimmering by,
And Night, the dark-blue hunter, followed fast,
Ceaseless pursuit and flight were in the sky.³

Could human words better convey the sense of life everywhere beneath the deep-blue throbbing Irish night? Who can forget the tragedy of loneliness and loss in—

the speaker had lost the thread
Or all the story of earth was told.

The dust hung over the pale dry ways
Dizzily fired with the twilight's gold,
And a bitter remembrance blew in each face
How all the story of earth was told.⁴

¹ P. 120.

² *The Middle Years*, p. 355.

³ *The Divine Vision*, by A. E., p. 40.

⁴ *Homeward Songs*, by A. E., p. 40.

The simplest, commonest happenings he can transfigure :—

Dusk wraps the village in its dim caress ;
Each chimney's vapour, like a thin, grey rod
Mounting aloft through miles of quietness
Pillars the skies of God.¹

This is not Mysticism : here is not the swift, intuitive apprehension, culminating, at last, in union of the human and divine : it is intrinsically Symbolism, but Symbolism interpenetrated with emotion, enkindled by

the dancing flame that leads afar,

till it rises and hovers on the confines of Mysticism. It is the matchless quality of Mr. Russell's own *Master Singer*² ; it is the inalienable conviction that

the fiery fancies thronging
Rise not out of clay,

the conviction which inspires the monition—

Keep the secret sense celestial
Of the starry birth.³

Finally, of all Mr. Russell's illumined lines can any transcend these, laden triumphantly with the promise of joy ?—

O the great gates of the mountain have opened once again,
And the sound of song and dancing falls upon the ears of men,
And the Land of Youth lies gleaming flushed with rainbow light and mirth,
And the old enchantment lingers in the honey-heart of earth.⁴

Here, surely, is the quintessence of the Irish Gael's Symbolism, a thing distinct, apart ; not necessarily greater, but still never to be mistaken for nor confused with the poetry of any other race whatever.

¹ *Homeward Songs*, p. 25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ *The Divine Vision*, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

VII. *English Poetry of the Early Twentieth Century*

WE are too close to it to appraise recent Poetry, too close to leave it entirely out of account. The actual opening years of the Twentieth Century were, so far as Poetry is concerned, marked by no startling sign or change. "The Nineties" had been decried, log-rolled by a few possibly, appraised with some justice, and had passed on their way. The new Era shewed, as yet, nothing novel, nothing challenging, certainly nothing better than the best of the preceding decade. A stray poem or two from Francis Thompson "sang the century on her way"; occasionally William Watson broke the silence; at times isolated poems from other poets of the Nineties starred the literary papers like sparse wind-flowers in a still unawakened wood.

Of new names the first six years only produced Gordon Bottomley, Walter de la Mare, John Masefield, W. H. Davies, Harold Monro and Maurice Baring. There was a pause. Possibly *reculer pour mieux sauter* may consciously or unconsciously have inspired it: but the leap seemed long in coming. Beyond gainsaying there was a pause. Again, it may have been unconscious apprehensiveness if the phrase be not too near akin to a "bull."

To those who foresaw that War in Europe was inevitable, even if they did not foresee all its then unborn horrors, it seemed inexplicable that the rest of the nation should be so blind; inexplicable that, if it were thus blind so to speak in its own right, it should still in the face of expert and disinterested warning, persistently repeated, continue, unmoved and heedless, its money-getting, its pleasure-hunting, its unmixed materialism. Perhaps even amongst the most apparently reckless there was, deep down and scarcely conscious, some sense at least of choking inability to seize on

the new century with joy and genuine, shining hope. Possibly if the great mass felt but could not manifest or really realise that they felt this, the same inability more keenly experienced may have displayed itself in the unexplained hesitancy of the Poets, for after all Poets, even minor ones, feel more than they comprehend. And so it was easier if Poetry were to come upon the scene at all, to argue about what was past, than to prepare a place for the new. It was easier to flout Tennyson as extravagantly as sometimes he had been overrated, to forget Browning's best, to refuse acknowledgment to Watson's delicate insight and skill in diction, to Thompson's magnificence in substance and form, to Dowson's exotic grace : it was easier, in short, to rob the dead than to add to their store of treasure a new Era's virgin gold. Those who cared profoundly for Poetry as the art, among all the Arts, the least capable of selfish monopoly, the most vital, the most indestructible, began to whisper to themselves this question : As we have lost the art of building, as painting has declined, as music has deteriorated, as even statecraft has fallen to shabby political trickery, is it even so that we have lost the gift of Poetry ? For some years, it seemed as if the answer must be, We have.

There was, however, in the opening decade of the new century, one department of human activity, which if it lacked something in finest quality could not be reproached on the score of exiguous quantity, the region of speculation. It was here so thin, there so temerarious, elsewhere so crudely ignorant, that it may seem to some extravagant to call it philosophy. Yet, philosophy of a sort it was, a legacy from the theorising and disputation of the nineteenth century. However shallow and jejune the questions and answers may have been, however little fitted by training and intellectual discipline the combatants might seem, yet underneath the spirit of universal challenge which characterised the young century, beneath its wayward scepticism and its open insubordination lay at least the desire to be "a lover of wisdom," Pythagoras' title for himself in far-off times. Whether this persistent mood of argument achieved much or little, at least it bore witness to a conviction that the whole scheme of things

has an underlying reason, and must be explicable somewhere, by some one, if not by us here and now. Further, in days when Science—the word being used in its true sense for the rational explanation of external sensible phenomena—threatened to oust everything but itself, the incessant questioning of hitherto accepted truths about non-material things, indicated some sense, at any rate, of the fact that Philosophy, whether or no it be worked out of set intention, is essential to all actively intellectual and spiritual life.

It is generally admitted, in the case of physical phenomena, that some knowledge of their causes and working is vital to progress, in other words that Science is necessary to and in human life. Whether generally admitted or no, it is impossible for observant and thoughtful people to deny the existence in human life of the non-material. Love “strong as death,” ambition, self-sacrifice, jealousy “cruel as the grave,” fear, treachery, compassion, these, just taken at random, are all non-material, extra-sensible, yet absolutely, entirely “real.” We cannot, it is true, see nor handle nor taste them, but they are woven into the very texture of our daily existence; they are closer to us, more vital, more intensely and utterly “us” than any material thing whatever.

Again, on the intellectual as apart from the emotional side of life, purpose, aim, aspiration are all parts of human existence; but they too, like the emotions, escape the apprehension of the senses: they are no part of Science strictly so-called; yet they—the stuff of and methods of the intellect, will and feelings—are not only a part but a main part of Philosophy. Since, on the lowest estimate, mind is of as much importance as the senses, and since thought and feeling control and direct humanity quite as much as, if not vastly more than, sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell, it should be no more necessary to plead the value of Philosophy than of Science. Then, further, both have or can have connexion with poetry. To argue that knowledge, organised knowledge (and that is science), contributes and can contribute nothing to Poetry would be outrageous. No doubt, some Poetry appeals just in and through its primitive simplicity, its total

lack of everything purely intellectual save the minimum of human experience, a minimum scarcely to be called by so weighty a name as knowledge. Besides this, there is the main bulk of the world's poetry, whose existence would be impossible without knowledge: poetry which owes an obvious and irremovable debt to philosophy, science, history, mythology, archaeology, in short to knowledge of all kinds, using the word knowledge in its widest, most inclusive sense.

The relation between Philosophy and Poetry had been unusually close throughout the nineteenth century: Shelley, in his skiey, unacademic fashion, pointed the way; Tennyson, and still more deliberately and persistently, Browning carried on the Tradition, while poets of the second and still lower ranks added their quota of philosophic verse. Alongside of other changes, political, industrial, what not, the sphere of Physical Science had increased, not only in dimensions, but in importance attached to it by those of the general Public who could claim in any sense to care for literature.

To the young poets of the young century, therefore, and as a natural result, was presented a chaotic mass of opinion, fact, and guess-work about every conceivable thought and thing. Perhaps their so-marked, so disappointing hesitancy arose in part from an inability, of which they may have been but partially aware, to grapple with the sum of confused, complicated and not seldom contradictory possibilities offered to them. Religious unsettlement sometimes crude and wilful, psychological hypotheses on tottering bases, kaleidoscopically changing theories concerning scientific phenomena, political disturbances national and international, social upheaval now sullen, then vehement, all that and more made a troubled perplexing environment. The passion for novelty was widespread; the taste not only for theory, but if possible for new and even bizarre theory was overpowering. Among all this, there grew up in the younger generation a curious self-consciousness, exceeding Youth's usual natural interest in itself and its concerns. There is, in poetic coteries, always a tendency towards taking one's self very seriously. But the

poets of the twentieth century seemed almost extravagantly aware of themselves. It may have been the unintentional if inevitable result of the current psychological insistence on "self-expression," a demand peculiarly embarrassing to all who had not very much "self," differing from the common run, to express, and who yet felt some shame in proving unequal to the clamorous demand. Possibly, it arose also from a dread of seeming to share in anything "Victorian." Yet, even if the decried "Victorian Age" were accepted at the worst estimate of its detractors, it still remains true that a general indictment can no more be levelled against a whole century than against a whole people. No century in the world's history is irredeemably bad or foolish.

In this vortex of activities, it is hardly surprising if adventurous youth threw broadcast its immature guesses and hopes; and, when genuine originality failed, took refuge in poses and fads. They felt something was expected of them, and in their efforts to respond, the harshest, least sympathetic critic must admit that, whatever their faults and failings, at least they avoided stagnation.

Of the poets of the first years of the new century, Mr. John Masfield was not only among the earliest but soon became the most generally known. His work divided itself quite naturally into three different sections; that which sprang from his years at sea, that which contains and conveys his social views and creed, and last, though most certainly not least, his shorter lyrics, inspired by Nature, and by the common happenings of human life.

The vernacular poems of the Sea which appeared in his 1902 volume, *Salt Water Ballads*, are neither great poetry in themselves nor new in kind. England possessed their analogue for the Army, one more inspired too by originality and energetic vitality, in Rudyard Kipling's *Soldier Ballads*. Mr. Masfield set his taste for the vernacular another task when he tried to render the crudeness and coarse brutality of the worst side of slum existence in measured lines of unmeasured words. Even here, his originality was only partial. The tragedies of obscurer human life had found some place in English Literature before: so delicate an artist as Dante

Rossetti had touched it at once truly and without coarseness. In the light of such recent work as that, Mr. Masfield's lurid realism seemed both repulsive and unconvincing. Nor was he really successful in his longer poems on quieter themes, more reticently handled. It is difficult not to wonder why, with the example of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and even that has its dragging, wearisome pages, before him, Mr. Masfield did not realise that such an autobiographical Poem as *Biography*, treated, not like *The Prelude* as a philosophical development, but diary-wise, days piled on days as though in a catalogue, is foredoomed to a failure of unrelieved boredom. For in such a poem, the sparse lines of beauty, and such occur, cannot possibly redeem the dead weight of the rest.

These are not the poems' nor the poet's only weaknesses ; of which the worst is perhaps his startling and seemingly unconscious inequality, his curious unawareness of the difference between real inspiration, and sheerest flattest *banalité*. How could the same man, in the same poem, write—

The night alone near water when I heard
All the sea's spirit spoken by a bird,

or that other picture, lacking something of this one's peculiar beauty of remembered sound, but bathed in exquisite colour—

Out of the hush a little barque slipped by,
Spilling the mist with changing gleams of red,

and also this rhythmless, drab couplet—

Wearing the last night out in still streets
Trodden by us and policemen on their beats ?

The verdict of posterity, should it concern itself about the matter, will probably be that Mr. Masfield is at his best in his lyrics. Though these stand in the lineal succession of England's minor lyrical verse, apt, picturesque, moving, sincere, yet few, very few reach that high level which ensures remembrance. None exhibit the chiselled perfection of William Watson's best, most characteristic craftsmanship, a quality which shone apart even in a generation which counted Tennyson and Matthew Arnold among its stylists. Equally, though they seem to aim at it, Masfield's lyrics fail

to achieve the heart-breaking simplicity, and wholly lack the swift intuition, the intangible complex of aspiration and emotion which are the substance and spirit of the most notable modern Irish verse. Masfield may contrive to remind us of these things, but he does not give them, nor anything comparable with them, to us. For all that, no one will deny that beautiful lines occur, if rather seldom, in his writings. Here is one from *Poems and Ballads*—

A grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

In fact, in suggestion, in diction it is good, but not supremely so : and it is quite one of his best. It will not, e.g. bear comparison with Watson's cry to Autumn—

Thou parable of greatness vanishing,

indeed, nothing in *Poems and Ballads* approaches the beauty of that one poem *Autumn*, in Mr. Watson's volume of 1892.

There is, however, in *Poems and Ballads* a poem which stands out from the rest, marked by a real difference of view and handling. It is a lyric no doubt, but not purely and simply lyrical, rather an effort after Symbolism, and that of the Irish-Gaelic type :—

Twilight. Red in the west.
Dimness. A glow on the wood.
The teams plod home to rest,
The wild ducks come to glean.
O souls not understood,
What a wild cry in the pool :
What things have the farm-ducks seen
That they cry so—huddle and cry ?

Only the soul that goes
Eager. Eager. Flying
Over the globe of the moon,
Over the wood that glows.
Wings linked. Necks a-strain
A rush and a wild crying

A cry of the long pain
In the reeds of a steel lagoon,
In a land that no man knows.

Any one familiar with Irish Symbolist verse must feel that this poem—*The Wild Duck*—falls far short of it in vision, suggestion, even in technical handling. Put it by the side of—

I stand upon the summit now :
 The falcon, flying from the heath
 Trails darkly o'er the mountain brow
 And drops into the gloom beneath.
 Night falls, and with it comes the wind
 That blew on Fionn time out of mind.
 When weary of love feasts and wars
 He left his comrades all behind
 To dream upon the quiet stars
 Here on the lonely mountain height
 In ecstasy and living light—
 The living inner light that burns
 With magic caught from those white urns
 That wander through the bracken blue
 Forever, touching those they know
 With beauty, and the things that come
 Of beauty. Earth lies at my feet,
 A dumb, vast shadow, vast as dumb,¹

and the contrast will be obvious enough between an attempt to make an incident symbolical, however vaguely, and it must be admitted that Mr. Masfield's three concluding lines are exceedingly vague, and the rendering of a particular moment, of something actually seen, which not only had an inner meaning, but one caught by the seer and conveyed to the reader. Mr. Campbell's lines do not leave us wondering whether he meant anything, and if so what in the world it was. In his much later *Earth of Cualann*,² still more apposite instances may be found, for there illustrations as well as verse are of the Symbolist School. But even he may not be the best example of Irish Symbolism; some may prefer Seumas O'Sullivan whose beautiful poem *The Sheep* is a wonderful achievement in the elusiveness of Symbolism. Part of it must suffice here :—

Slowly they pass
 In the grey of the evening
 On the wet road
 A flock of sheep.

Ah, what memories
 Loom for a moment

Of the white days
 When we two together
 Went in the evening
 Where the sheep lay.

¹ *The Mountainy Singer*, Seosamh MacCathmhaoil, p. 41.

² Published in 1917.

Whitely they gleam
 For a moment and vanish
 Away in the dimness
 Of sorrowful years ;
 Gleam for a moment
 All white and go fading
 Away in the greyness
 Of sundering years.

If critics, accustomed to the poetry of an earlier day, felt some lack, some thinness of thought, some poverty of originality, the young Poets of the Georgian age were not dismayed. At least, they possessed sufficient force to be aware of themselves, and to mean to make other people aware of them.

In December, 1912, there appeared a demure drab volume, *Georgian Poetry*, 1911-1912. There they were and with a name to differentiate them from the rest. This was followed in October, 1915, by a thicker book, garbed in a cheerful blue, *Georgian Poetry*, 1913-1915. Then in September, 1917, came the thinnest of all, green like the grass, *Georgian Poetry*, 1916-1917, proclaiming itself as the third attempt to present "chosen examples from the work of contemporary poets belonging to the younger generation."

The reader may notice that besides Mr. Masfield only seven poets appear in all three of the volumes. One is Mr. James Stephens, who seems rather a stranger in this galley, his place being surely on the outskirts of the Irish-Gaelic school. The best-known of the others are probably Mr. Walter de la Mare, Mr. W. W. Gibson and Mr. John Drinkwater. But not every one accepts these as the most typical of the coterie. In reviewing the Georgian third volume, the *Morning Post's* critic called a newer entrant, Mr. Ralph Hodgson "as 'Georgian' as Harold Monro, and I can't say more than that." Again, a critic in the *Times Literary Supplement* used the word Georgian as if it had a definite and generally-accepted meaning, when he wrote of one of Mr. Nichols' poems : "That is 'Georgian' enough in its vocabulary, its rhythm, its actuality. It does not dress things up, it uses form as it will. But form it has, and being so sincere, so direct, so Georgian as it is . . ." etc. Yet the *Morning Post's* reviewer, having used the adjective with a similar airy

confidence closes on a note of doubt, "So, finally, 'what is a Georgian?' " he asks.

Let us leave that however, at any rate for the present, and take his positive statement that Mr. Harold Monro is the quintessence of Georgianism.

If we are to accept the Georgian books as representative—and if not, what was the use of presenting such carefully-made selections?—then judging by the examples of Mr. Monro's art as displayed in these three volumes, one can but conclude that Georgianism is not one and one only method, for his three contributions are singularly dissimilar. In the first volume, the poems *Child of Dawn* and *Lake Leman* are examples of natural pictures pleasantly seen, carefully noted, gracefully described in chosen out, rather jewelled phrases, such poems as the young century produced in considerable quantity. The second volume contains the very original *Overheard on a Salt Marsh*, a wild elfin thing without a trace of obviousness or commonplace, and also the strange *Children of Love* which unfortunately escapes beauty through the dull unawareness, trenching at last on irreverence, which runs through it. Lastly, there is the poem of every-day things called *Milk for the Cat*, which foreshadows those in the third volume, suggesting his later method, while giving the impression of being still a genuine mood and not a pose. These later poems, about the *Clod of Earth* or the *April Flower*, and still more, *Every Thing*, wherein the whole inanimate mechanism of every-day life becomes articulate, really do suggest a pose. Those among us who, like Mr. Monro, have sometimes thought that too lightly we impute inanimacy to material things, still cannot bring ourselves to call such lines as these Poetry—

The old impetuous Gas above my head
Begins irascibly to flare and fret,
Wheezing into its epileptic jet
Reminding me I ought to go to bed.

The rafters creak; an Empty-Cupboard door
Swings open: now a wild plank of the floor
Breaks from its joist and leaps behind my foot.
Down from the chimney half a pound of soot
Tumbles and lies and shakes itself again.
The putty cracks against the window pane.
A piece of paper in the basket shoves
Another piece, and toward the bottom moves,—

and so on, until nothing of his daily environment even down to his elderly boots and hat have been omitted. The reader is left gasping. It cannot be a joke as the total absence of humour is one of its most grievous marks. Indeed the closing lines—

There is not much dissimilarity,
Not much to choose, I know it well, in fine,
Between the purposes of you and me,
And your eventual Rubbish Heap and mine,

seem to suggest some straining after Philosophy. And what a starved, miserable Philosophy at that.

Across the "sundering years" a voice steals, uttering its pathetic yet profoundly dignified apostrophe, conveying in a stately prose, almost as musical as finest Poetry, the infinite complications and contradictions of Humanity :—

"Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l'homme ! quelle nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel sujet de contradiction, quel prodige ! Juge de toutes choses, imbécile ver de terre, dépositaire du vrai, cloaque d'incertitude et d'erreur, gloire et rebut de l'univers."¹

How different that is from the laboured triviality of *Every Thing*. If this latter really be Georgianism we cannot but be thankful that the War has put a stop to it. Even when Mr. Monro raises his cult of common things to a higher level, he is still unconvincing. Take, for instance, *Solitude* :—

When you have tidied all things for the night
And while your thoughts are fading to their sleep,
You'll pause a moment in the late firelight
Too sorrowful to weep.

The large and gentle furniture has stood
In sympathetic silence all the day
With that old kindness of domestic wood :
Nevertheless the haunted room will say,
"Some one must be away."

The little dog rolls over half awake,
Stretches his paws, yawns looking up at you,
Wags his tail very slightly for your sake
That you may feel he is unhappy too.

A distant engine whistles, or the floor
Creaks, or the wandering night-wind bangs a door.

¹ *Pensées* de Pascal, ch. x., 1.

Silence is scattered like a broken glass.
The minutes prick their ears and run about,
Then one by one subside again and pass
Sedately in, monotonously out.

You bend your head and wipe away a tear,
Solitude walks one heavy step more near.

Apart from the obviously laboured and so false image of the minutes this whole poem is a manufactured thing about an artificial mood. It has no touch of the deep-seated, genuine melancholy of Regnier's *Frisson du Soir* :—

Le crépuscule lent monte jusqu'au plafond
Où des rayons perdus caressent les moulures,
Le miroir familial à tes seules allures
Ne reflète plus rien dans son cadre profond.

Et cette ombre qui vient, ô douce, nous sépare,
C'est comme si quelqu'un se mettait entre nous ;
Je suis là près de toi pourtant, à tes genoux,
Et je serre tes mains avec des peurs d'avare,

Car j'évoque les soirs des funestes départs
Où dans la chambre obscure et veuve de l'absente,¹
On rassemble, en pleurant, dans l'ombre grandissante
Le trésor douloureux des souvenirs épars.¹

That similar suggestiveness, without here the note of pathos however, is possible in English, Flecker has shewn :—

And still I hear each sound that falls,
The wood that starts in the sun's heat,
The mouse astir among the walls,
While down the summer smitten street
A cart rolls lonely on : the hush
Tightens : I hear the flickering brush.²

But Mr. Monro's handling of the inanimate does not even approach the lesser pathos of such a poem as Charles Théophile Féret's concerning—not one's own houses but those of other people—

Pour les pignons où l'Autrefois
Adorable se perpétue,
Pour les vieilles maisons de bois
Qu'on tue,
Frères, je sonne le tocsin.

C'est dans le décor d'autrefois
Que l'âme s'éveille aux légendes,
Dans les vieilles maisons de bois
Normandes,

¹ *Premiers Poèmes*, Henri de Regnier, p. 49.

² *The Painter's Mistress*, J. E. Flecker, *Collected Poems*, p. 192.

Par les chemins gibbeux et tors
 Oh ! combien nous les aimons toutes,
 Dans la ruelle gueuse, aux bords
 Des routes

Mais qu'importe la vétusté
 Pourvu que notre amour ne meure ?
 Des fronts qui sont chers la beauté
 Demeure.

If any one will argue that the genius of French Poetry, of the French people, lends itself specially to these regrets, these intimate sorrows over the dead past, what will he say of Flecker's poem, already quoted, or in a far more poignant way, of Mr. Squire's poem to the *Bull Dog*, in the third Georgian volume ? Here, in this last, indeed, without any recondite search or elaborate handling is the unbearable pain of those losses which nothing can make good : here, is no carefully-worded rendering of a half artificial, half sentimental mood, but rather that age-long grief which befalls Humanity time after time, in all places, and relentlessly :—

We shan't see Willy any more, Mamie,
 He won't be coming any more :
 He came back once and again and again,
 But he won't get leave any more.

We looked from the window, and there was his cab,
 And we ran downstairs like a streak,
 And he said, "Hullo, you bad dog," and you crouched to the floor,
 Paralysed to hear him speak.

We went upstairs to the studio,
 The three of us, just as of old,
 And you lay down and I sat and talked to him
 As round the room he strolled.

Here in this room where years ago
 Before the old life stopped,
 He worked all day with his slippers and his pipe,
 He would pick up the threads he had dropped.

Fondling all the drawings he had left behind,
 Glad to find them all still the same,
 And opening the cupboards to look at his belongings
 . . . Every time he came.

But now I know what a dog doesn't know,
 Though you'll thrust your head on my knee,
 And try to draw me from the absent-mindedness
 That you find so dull in me.

And all your life you will never know
 What I wouldn't tell you even if I could,
 That the last time we waved him away
 Willy went for good.

summer evening chases in the garden
 When you dodged us all about with a bone :
 We were three boys, and you were the cleverest,
 And now we're two alone.

When summer comes again
 And the long sunsets fade,
 We shall have to go on playing the feeble game for two
 That since the war we've played.

I must sit not speaking on the sofa,
 While you lie asleep on the floor ;
 For he's suffered a thing that dogs couldn't dream of
 And he won't be coming here any more.

It cannot be urged too often that Art fails unless it be co-extensive, in aim and grasp, with Life ; inclusive of the great, the small, and, hardest of all, inclusive of that commonplace which lies between these. This is no plea, on either limit, for repulsive realism or withdrawn fastidiousness, it is a plea for sincerity and comprehension. Here, in this poem of Mr. Squire, told in the simplest, almost bald, ballad form, with its uneven lilt of interrupted, jogging, every-day life, is the very stuff of Tragedy, that diurnal, urgent, intimate tragedy which the twentieth century is learning in fire and blood and bitterness of soul. Here, is no searching after effects, effects are too close at hand for that ; here is no elaborate choice of word or phrase, the pain is too instant : here is the plainest rendering of the real essential havoc of war ; the depths of sacrifice exacted not from the few ultra-heroic, but over and over again from any and all, exacted and paid, are here nakedly exposed ; life broken off short, desolate solitude never again to be wholly solaced here, and the dumb helpless distress of a faithful beast. Before the revelations of the last four years, some of us might have instanced *Geist's Grave* as a typically true poem on human and animal relations. But that, in spite of its real emotion and beautiful phrasing, fades and pales beside the heart-broken simplicity, the irremediable pain of this, whose very ruggedness and spontaneity give it a distinction all its own, in the ever-growing volume of War-

poetry. It is no delicate sorrow to be soothed with a few easy tears, but heart-wringing anguish which endures.

If the "Georgians" really desired an abiding place in Poetry's House of Fame, Mr. Drinkwater and Mr. W. W. Gibson—leaving Elroy Flecker out for the moment—were more likely to win it than Mr. Monro. No doubt, both are too often guilty of the weaknesses which mark, more or less, all the Georgians; their superabundance of words, their meagreness of subject-matter, and, perhaps their most sterilising as it certainly is their most irritating, fault, the obvious element of "manufacture" in their poetry, or, to express it from the other side, the lack of inevitability in it, the absence of anything like an overmastering impulse. It is not quite "much ado about nothing," yet the reader feels that writing poetry was to them less a necessity than a self-imposed occupation. Mr. Drinkwater comes near to providing an epitaph for this lean time :—

Poor barren years that brooded over much
On your own burden; pale and stricken years—
Go down to your oblivion, we part
With no reproach or ceremonial tears.¹

These two, however, rise above the rest, escaping their narrow limitations. Even those of us who may feel that unnecessary space and pains have been bestowed on *The Carver in Stone*² will still trace in it a reverence for some high things too long absent from the work of the new generation; and in this poem in particular a return to the mood of the great Cathedral-Builders of the past :—

And so he wrought the gods upon the wall,
Living and crying out of his desire,
Out of his patient incorruptible thought
Wrought them in joy was wages to his faith,³

though even here there is the modern element of "self-expression" rather than of the self-abnegation of those eager craftsmen of the twelfth and immediately following centuries, who wrought in stone and wood and glass, for Worship and not for their own credit. It is curious to realise that this later

¹ *Georgian Poetry*, 1911-1912, p. 75.

² *Ibid.*, 1913-1915, p. 92.

³ *Ibid.*, 1913-1915, p. 99.

poem really shews less desire for the things of the spirit than his pre-War poem, *The Fires of God*, where the same idea underlies the pride of the man which Browning, through the mouth of Festus, rebuked in Paracelsus. Though the poem is somewhat tediously drawn out, and though its close is unconvincing, it contains some beautiful lines, e.g.—

the wide
Beat of the pilgrim winds and labouring seas,¹

and better still—

the inscrutable wonder of the stars
Flung out along the reaches of the night.²

Further, Mr. Drinkwater has, at least, just recognised the great fact of the active, efficient value of sacrificial pain, that high doctrine to which a writer in a recent number of the *Nineteenth Century* alludes scoffingly when he wrote of his opponents: "Their shifting and uneasy minds still clung to the gospel of suffering and pain." Not so the Poet: he commits himself to words as definite as these:—

In sorrow we have grown to be
Masters of adversity.³

Mr. Gibson outstrips Mr. Drinkwater in imagery. Nor will the charge of deliberate manufacture lie so easily against him. Wordy and excessively long he may sometimes be, but as the *Devil's Edge*—which opens with a fine picture shewing his gift of imagery—and *The Hare* prove, he has real meaning underneath. His exceedingly fine poem on Rupert Brooke⁴ establishes his ability to rise very high when he chooses.

Mr. Walter de la Mare's place in English Literature may give rise to controversy. He has been tremendously praised, even promised, perhaps already allotted, a seat among the immortals. If his final place be less than that, it may yet prove secure. Perhaps it is too obvious to say that he has contrived to keep the heart of a child, but it is the simple truth; and having done so he manages, a rare feat, to win children's hearts. He can write for them because he has not

¹ *Georgian Poetry*, 1911-1912, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Fires of God*.

⁴ *Fortnightly Review*, Feb., 1916.

left off being of them. Yet, he also possesses qualities which only wise Age can fully appreciate ; qualities, shewn, e.g. in *The Listeners*, with its *Childe Rolandish* setting, and in the recollected lines :—

When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,
And all her lovelier things even lovelier grow ;
Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees
Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.¹

The curious fate of unhappy and inexplicable omissions which seems so often to dog Anthologies has led the Georgian editor to leave out *A Song of Enchantment*,² a poem entirely worthy of its title, and in its brief compass wonderfully comprehending and displaying his most characteristic qualities. But the doubt concerning his eventual niche remains, increased rather than removed by his later work. The fine stuff of dreams is still in them, the witcheries of water, air, sound and colour, but all the same, there seems too little substance. We who have lived through the ever-coarsening ruthlessness of the War years, can still see beyond and through its obvious desolation and destruction. Tempted to cry " It's a mad world, my masters," we yet in our hearts know that the ground plan is still sane and sound. Even amidst its blackest ruin we catch the glint of the Phoenix element in mortal things. If ordinary people can avail for that, it seems as though some more clairvoyant Vision should dower the Poets, and just there these " typical Georgians " fail. They have vision, they can dream, but mostly about matters not instantly urgent to us. The future verdict on the three may incline to Mr. Drinkwater, for the War has brought a more human strand into his verse. A very small instance may be found in the poem on Sussex, in the volume whose title describes its moment, *Swords and Ploughshares*. It has been a kind of fashion lately to write poems of locality, and Sussex has received more than her share at the hands of the alien-born ; but this one really breathes the elusive charm of that incomparable county—

And peace upon your pasture lands I found
Where grazing flocks drift on continually,
As little clouds that travel with no sound
Across a windless sky.

¹ *Georgian Poetry*, 1913-1915, p. 77.

² *Peacock Pie*, p. 171.

A man is tired, and sore of heart before he comes to such solace : the fragrance of the close down-turf, with its tiny flowers, and the soundless flight of drifting thistle-downs, like homing souls coming silverly to earth, is in these lines. All the sweet quiet, the golden peace of Sussex breathes in

Under the calm ascension of the night
We heard the mellow lapsing and return
Of night-owls purring in their groundling flight
Through lanes of darkling fern.

A graver, still austerer beauty shines in his poem, first published in the *Fortnightly Review*,¹ *Sunrise on Rydal Water* :—

Moveless the water and the mist,
Moveless the secret air above,
Hushed as upon some happy tryst
The poised expectancy of love ;
What spirit is it that adores,
What mighty presence yet unseen,
What consummation works apace
Between
These rapt enchanted shores ?

So the old mating goes apace,
Wind with the sea, and blood with thought,
Lover with lover ; and the grace
Of understanding comes unsought,
When stars into the twilight steer,
Or thrushes build among the may,
Or wonder moves between the hills
And day
Comes up on Rydal mere.

Here, that sense of the laboured manufacture of a subject, which marred some of his earlier work, has disappeared.

There is a younger coterie than the "Georgians," one immensely aware of itself and its work, viz. that succession of young Oxford singers, whose work, since 1910, Mr. Blackwell has so generously published, sometimes in single volumes, and then, gathering them together, in several collections. There have been among them not a few poems of interest, some of promise, but, on the whole, as perhaps is only to be expected, they are far more good College exercises than lasting Poetry. Their peculiar weakness, with a few notable exceptions, is that their form is more distinguished than their matter, the latter sharing the poverty of the early Georgians. Also, as the

¹ December, 1915.

years pass, the necessity of maintaining the annual output seems to have appeared more pressing to them than the inner imperious goad of real thought surging up into fit words. The 1917 volume is the most disappointing in this respect. Mr. Earp, e.g. whose earlier work deserved and won some praise, is represented by very thin achievement here. Miss Rendall, some of whose poetry had real distinction, contributes a not wholly successful translation of Albert Samain's *L'Infante*, which certainly does not rise to a poetic *rendering*: often she seems to be hampered by the precise words of the original, and yet when she strives to free herself, wanders unduly far from the poet's idea.

Miss Ellis-Fermor's *Sed Miles* and Miss Evans' *Hamadryad* (by an alphabetical chance they face one another) are probably the best in this meagre collection; yet neither approaches the better poems in the 1915 volume, such as Mr. Rice-Oxley's *Night*, Mr. Tolkien's delightfully childlike, ineffably gay *Goblin Feet* or Miss Duff's *Black Oxen*, saturated as the last is with that kind of unrelieved melancholy which tinged all the work of an earlier University woman, Amy Levy. It is a curious and not very cheering fact that recent years should not have deepened the sense of that which really matters in the generation which, blessed by all the advantages of an Oxford training, is just about to take its share of the national life, at this vital moment too, into its hands. No one demands or desires that all poetry, all art should concern itself about or be dominated by the War,—that would indeed mean a Teutonic victory. War, as civilised nations understand it, is no end in itself, only a means to an end, and that end is the preservation, the securing for the Future, of "the things that are more excellent." But the dreadful years should have cured us all, young, middle-aged and old, of fiddling while Rome burns: it should have taught us not to fidget round the edges of life, not to waste our substance on that which is nothing worth. Above all, we should have learned sincerity, have learned the essential destructiveness of self-centredness, and the worse than folly of every sort of posturing.

It is temerarious to attempt definitive judgments on poems of a new generation while they are still so fresh: but to the

critic whose poetical era was the nineteenth century, the conviction will return that the judgment of Time—that judgment which appraises finally one after another the “bright particular stars,” whose effulgence was under or over but seldom rightly rated by co-temporaries—will be severe on such “typical Georgians” as Harold Monro and Ralph Hodgson with their almost brutal bluntness, their cruel tearing away of all illusion,—Mr. Hodgson’s *Bull*, extolled though it was, is a typical instance of his ruthlessness: the judgment of Time will be severe too, though, remembering what is due to youth, less so to the emptiness and posing so common among a whole tribe of young poetasters, and it will pick and choose with careful discrimination among the poems of Mr. Drinkwater, Mr. Gibson and Mr. de la Mare. Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie escapes from the Georgian mode. His poems are interesting, suggestive; there is no “emptiness” in his work: but there is a curious quality in it which suggests that an elaborately wrought and embroidered prose might have proved a happier vehicle. As they are, they have escaped the decade’s too easily satisfied facility.

Francis Ledwidge again was given a place in the third Georgian volume, but he should rather be reckoned among the modern Irish School. Possibly his work has been overpraised, his poems too may have suffered from too easy a fluency. But it must be remembered that they were a beginning, which can have no continuance now. Winnowed by years, perfected by experience, he might have produced poetry to justify the best hopes of those who sponsored him so generously.

Whatever judgment be passed on the early Georgians the third volume cannot be placed in the same category as the two first; mainly, however, on account of the new-comers, whose contributions are immune from their predecessors’ failings. There are some seven or eight of these, but three are markedly superior to the rest. Mr. Turner has fallen under the spell of the distant and the strange, recalling moods of Claudel or Flecker:—

The land, the land of Yucatan

The splendid dream of Yucatan!

I met thee first long, long ago
 Turning a printed page, and I
 Stared at a world I did not know
 And felt my blood like fire flow
 At that strange name of Yucatan :—

and he lies under the spell of Hellas too, as in the beautiful *Sky-sent Death*, with its grace and colour and sound.

Mr. Freeman strikes a note which is returning into English thought, the note of gain through sacrifice, of strength as the outcome of surrender. There have been more musical lyrics, even during the war, than *Happy is England Now*, but the stuff of it is good. Mr. Freeman is no trifler with substance nor trafficker in words : he writes because he has seen, and must write, as, e.g. in *The Pigeons*, where under the beguiling title lie horror and tragedy, the tragedy of the poor ; removed, by his artistic sense, from all needlessly sordid squalor. Another poem, *Stone Trees*, was wisely included to shew the Poet's other qualities, his response to nature, and to her hidden mystery, his quick alertness, his imagination.

The Future may crown Mr. Nichols as the most distinguished of these three. Very likely the poems of battle are too close to the lively horror of war to be very musical, but in such a one as *The Assault* he reveals a quality too seldom found in the Georgians. Here, at last, is a man not willing to drift, to lounge as the sport of chance and circumstance, a man who will take the hard lot of life, face it, buckram his feelings and will, and master the foe or go down in the strife. Not one word of complaint sullies his finely-tempered valour, for tempered, deliberately wrought, it is :—

My heart burns hot, whiter and whiter
 Contracts tighter and tighter
 Until I stifle with the will
 Long forged, now used.

The Gospel of Ease and all the methods of the Primrose Way lie in discarded shards on the field of battle. There, the Will, "long forged," comes to its own :—

How's time ? Soon now. Two minutes or less.
 The guns' fury mounting higher . . .
 Their utmost. I lift a silent hand. Unseen I bless
 Those hearts will follow me.

And beautifully
 Now beautifully my will grips
 Soul calm and round and filmed and white.

Gather heart all thoughts that drift ;
 Be steel, soul,
 Compress thyself
 Into a round bright whole.
 I cannot speak

Time. Time !

I hear my whistle shriek,
 Between teeth set ;
 I fling an arm up,
 Scramble up the grime
 Over the parapet !

There, in the moulded, deliberately wrought will, in controlled and disciplined fear, in the love of home, there, in the storm of life held at bay and defied by the soul and heart of a man, is the age-long victory of the human race ; of such it is as true as of the old-time warrior, " the bruit of his manliness was spread everywhere." In these rough verses lie imbedded the raw materials which have made possible another poem, externally very dissimilar, yet owing its ethos to the struggle and stress and victory enshrined in the other. Out of the strife and horror Mr. Nichols can rise to write descriptions such leagues removed from all this dust and din and chaos as—

men drive galleys' golden beaks
 To isles beyond the sunset peaks,
 And cities on the sea behold
 Whose walls are glass whose gates are gold,
 Whose turrets risen in an hour
 Dazzle between the sun and shower.

In the spiritual as in the physical, the one mood develops out of the other. Out of the deliberately steeled and tempered will which shone on the battlefield comes the philosophic peace, the high rare rest of—

No more shall he feel pitched and hurled
 Uncomprehended into this world ;
 For every place shall be his place,
 And he shall recognise its face.

Ev'n Sorrow, to be escaped of none
 But a more deep communion
 Shall be to him, and Death at last
 No more dreaded than the Past.

Obviously, undeniably there is some lack of polish, and not a little failure in rhythm here : but crude form is more corrigible than emptiness of matter. Mr. Nichols has left the "typical Georgians," somewhere on the road, rather a long way behind. Thrusting aside schools and coteries, what name or names stand out supremely in these early years of the twentieth century ? Surely among the essentially pre-War Poets, Time will award the bays to James Elroy Flecker. Everything of real worth in the rest, their carefully chosen words and phrases, their imagery, their curious love for all which is strange because it is Oriental or exotic, he possessed ; and in him it all seemed natural, not sought-for, and assumed and "precious." All this, then, he had, but very much besides.

Among the War-Poets, it is still more hazardous to guess, yet it is impossible to doubt that posterity will cling to their work in the mass, as to a very precious and revealing treasure. Which among them it will choose for lasting fame, who can say, while Victory still delays, and the storm may yet hide some undiscovered Poet.

J. E. Flecker's first slight volume, *Forty-Two Poems*, first published in 1911, attracted comparatively little notice. The book which won him his high place among the Poets of the New century was *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*. No doubt, the Preface, boldly proclaiming his possession of a "Theory," unblushingly admiring the Parnassian *passion du beau*, and its *facture soignée*, had some part in attracting attention, but the verse itself was of a totally different order to the general run of the Georgian performance, and the difference was wholly one of merit. Still he was claimed by them, though the two poems, included in the first Georgian volume, viz. *Joseph and Mary* and *The Queen's Song* are no adequate sample of his power. Indeed the first represents his weakest side ; in a private letter he condemned most of his sacred poems as "piffle," adding the blighting comment, "They degrade religion into a decorative motive and are very popular !"¹ *The Queen's Song*, inadequate as a typical instance, yet shone with a light and grace prophetic of the

¹ See the *Poetry Review* for Sept.-Oct., 1917, p. 265.

future, and was not a little remarkable in the company among which it was placed.

In the second Georgian volume, his contribution was better chosen and stands out in still more brilliant contrast to the rest ; though even so it is by no means the most representative selection possible. Of course *The Gates of Damascus* could not be omitted by the anthologist, but surely space could have been found for poems of such intrinsic worth and so representative of his many-faceted capacity as *In Phœacia*, *Hyali*, *A Ship an Isle a Sickle Moon*, *No Coward's Song*, *In Memoriam*, as the curious, satiric *Taoping*, and *Narcissus*. Moreover, there is that early poem, *Tenebris Interlucentem*, which hardly any one else would have written—

A linnet who had lost her way
Sang on a blackened bough in Hell,
Till all the ghosts remembered well
The trees, the wind, the golden day.

At last they knew that they had died
When they heard music in that land,
And some one then stole forth a hand
To draw a brother to his side.

A critic may well wonder too why no one of his translations was included, for real translation is not only, as Mr. Squire pointed out in his Preface to Flecker's *Collected Poems*, "so excellent as a discipline," but is great art. Some of Flecker's, notably *Philomel*, from his favourite Paul Fort,¹ and *Pannyra of the Golden Heel* from Samain, were not only translations, but true and beautiful poems. Finally, what dull spirit was it which dictated the omission of that poem of his dying days in Switzerland, *Stillness*?

Flecker was never really of the Georgian band ; his absence from England first in the East and then in Switzerland fortunately removed him from every possibility of belonging to a coterie ; but if he was to be included among them, as he did not seem to object to being, he might have been represented by a less misleading selection. So far, in the twentieth century in England, he reigns alone ; he has the sharp lights,

¹ "It is Paul Fort, who can shew us what it is to be a Poet—it simply means an enthusiasm for the world in every detail" (Letter dated Montana sur Sierre, Dec. 15, 1913, published in the *Poetry Review*, Sept.-Oct., 1917).

the clean edges of the Parnassians ; the alertness to " significance " of the Symbolists ; he has besides real feeling, passion, a love of colour, of delicate, shifting colour, of uncommon *nuances*, a rare perception of the value of texture, a quick, daring fancy, a lambent wit, an alert responsiveness both of thought and feeling. All these gifts together would have separated him out in a more distinguished time than his : in that unlit period they raised him to a superiority which was not popularly admitted or acclaimed till he was dead.

Possibly his distinction, largely the outcome of great gifts, was partly due too to hard work, consequent on his conviction, a conviction so unfamiliar to many English people, that Literature is a great thing with principles and a technique of its own, that it is, in sober fact, a serious thing, a craft and art worthy of a man's best hours and powers, a most strenuous undertaking ; not just a plaything, or light recreation for an hour snatched from important business.

Flecker worked at his Art ; he knew and cared to know what other poets had done, and were doing, he realised the significance of recent and current French Poetry. He did not disdain the humble discipline of translation, but raised it, as has been noted here, to a fine art. When the extreme difficulty of translating English and French into each other is realised, his achievement in this direction will be admitted to deserve the epithet great.

It is not merely that in poems like *Taoping* and *Epithalamion* he reminds one of the perfection of Heredia, or that in *Hyali* he recalls the illumined, dawn-bathed sunset-hued *Stances* of Jean Moréas, but that in actual translation he excels. *Pannyra of the Golden Heel*, his rendering of Albert Samain's *Pannyre aux Talons d'Or*, already mentioned, is wonderful enough ; but his translation of Paul Fort's *Philomèle* surmounts subtler obstacles, and achieves a rarer success. A part only must suffice here :—

Sans un souffle, pourtant, que de métamorphoses ! Le clair de lune assiste à la ruine des roses.

Déjà tous les rosiers ont fléchi sur leurs tiges. Il passe une rafale de roses en vertige.

dans le rapide espace que fait l'herbe couchée, s'effrayant de ton hymne, ô rossignol caché !

Un long frisson de crainte effeuille le jardin. La lune met des
masques ; elle brille et s'éteint.

Dans le gazon peureux, pétales grelottants, tournez-vous vers
la terre et vers ce qu'on entend.

Écoutez : cela vient du plus profond de l'Ombre. Est-ce la
cœur du monde qui bat sous le jardin ?

On entend un coup sourd, deux coups, trois coups qui
montent ; d'autres précipités, sonores et qui montent.

Prisonnier de la terre, un cœur approche ; il vient le bruit
d'un cœur immense à travers l'herbe rase.

Les pétales volètent. La terre se soulève. Et, le corps sous
les roses bleues de clair de lune,

l'éternelle déesse, la puissante Cybèle, douce et levant le front,
écoute Philomèle,¹

which Flecker translated thus :—

And yet the world has changed without a breath
The moon lies heavy on the roses' death,
And every rose-bush droops its leafy crown.
A gust of roses has gone sweeping down.

The panicked garden drives her leaves about :
The moon is masked : it flares and flickers out.
O shivering petals on your lawn of fear,
Turn down to Earth and hear what you shall hear.

A beat, a beat, a beat beneath the ground,
And hurrying beats, and one great beat profound.
A heart is coming close : I have heard pass
The noise of a great Heart upon the grass.
The petals reel. Earth opens : from beneath
The ashen roses on their lawn of death
Raising her peaceful brow, the grand and pale
Demeter listens to the nightingale. ²

His rendering of Moréas' *La rose du jardin que j'avais méprisée*³
is not less felicitous. One cannot help wishing he had added
to this side of his work. What might not he, who knew so
well the meaning and worth of silvered, ochred and umbered
hues, of reflections, shadows, of the clarity of light—

hyacinthine mist, and shining gold

¹ *Œuvres de Paul Fort*, vol. iii.

² *Collected Poems*, J. E. Flecker, p. 227.

³ Though Flecker represented this as being from *Les Stances*, it was
not included in the original volume, but appeared in *Le Figaro*, Dec.
1903.

OR

burning bright
Threads of the Sun across the sea,

OR

the pale and crystal desert hills.
... the river of the sun that fills
With founts of gold the lakes or Orient sky—

what might not he have made for instance of Charles van Lerberghe's *De mon mystérieux Voyage*, and in particular of the second and third stanzas ?—

Mais pour toi de mes yeux ardents,
J'ai regardé dans l'air et l'onde,
Dans le feu clair and dans le vent,
Dans toutes les splendeurs du monde,
Afin d'apprendre à mieux te voir,
Dans toutes les ombres du soir.

Afin d'apprendre à mieux d'entendre
J'ai mis l'oreille à tous les sons,
Écouté toutes les chansons,
Tous les murmures, et la danse
De la clarté dans le silence.¹

Surely these lines are in perfect harmony with Flecker's genius and taste, and not least the last two. If then we put him in a place apart, for he was not, by nature, of their kind, while circumstances rendered him even less so, the outlook of the Georgians must seem to a critic of an earlier, ampler time, not a little unsatisfactory. There did not appear to be sufficient substance, using that word in its proper, original meaning, beneath their theory and performance. Then, suddenly, into the fat, quiet, materially-comforted peace which lent itself so kindly to the elaborately manufactured Poetry of the century's early years, broke the European War. Its effect on the young writers, on the great majority of them, was instantaneous, most notably on the petted Child of Sunny Hours, Rupert Brooke, whose great natural gifts were untimely delayed of their full fruition by the excessive laudation of not a few. No one denied those gifts, but some regretted their cheated fruits. Now, those who most lamented that waste, consequent on wholesale and indiscriminating praise, would willingly admit that had he survived the war,

¹ *La Chanson d'Eve*, Charles van Lerberghe.

England would have found another very great Poet, the real Rupert Brooke.

While every lover of Cambridge, which means every alive soul who knows the little gray town on the Cam, has been lulled into reminiscent peace by his lines on Grantchester—

I only know that you may lie
Day long and watch the Cambridge sky,
And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass,
Hear the cool lapse of hours pass,
Until the centuries blend and blur
In Grantchester, in Grantchester,¹

no one would dream of putting them near that moving sonnet, *The Dead*? Truly, the War was needed by most of us, not least by our young Poets.

That he should have met his death in endeavouring to deal with such a race, as he scathingly depicted in his sonnet *Dawn*,² has a curiously dramatic fitness. From his earliest days, there was no possibility of a meeting-ground between his fastidious taste and such gross humanity; for in his "realism" there was still an eclectic strain. It is far too soon, and even civilian critics are too saturated with the horror, crudeness and magnificence all mingled bewilderingly together in this Titanic tempest of War, for any detailed attempt to be made fruitfully in the task of estimating the War Poetry. Appraisal is for a later, quieter, better-informed Age, if such should dawn. Nevertheless, contemporary thought and judgment may have their value and place in that final estimate, and already, in scattered volumes by soldiers, living or dead, in collections like the two *Soldier Poets*, or the third Georgian volume, and, not least, in many numbers of the *Poetry Review*, there is a mass of material ready to hand. It is, at any rate, neither too soon nor out of place to note the restoration of certain elements too long strangers to us, or the subtle change, wrought by the War, in some others; not too soon to welcome the return of light, of stable hope, and high aspiration. The change may be found, small yet unmistakable, in a perhaps unexpected place, viz. among what may be called poems of locality, a type which had become a rather marked

¹ *Poems*, 1911.

² 1914 and *Other Poems*, p. 13.

feature of recent poetry. Possibly the fashion was set by Mr. Laurence Housman, who in the late Nineties, produced *The Shropshire Lad*. Poems of locality poured from various pens : Devon, Somerset, Gloucester, Sussex all had their turn. When a county was sung by one of its own people, as Gloucestershire was by Flecker, all was well : when one suffered, as, more than once, Sussex has done, at the hands of an alien, things went less well.

But let us take these local songs at their best, such, e.g. as Mr. Housman's

As through the wild green hills of Wyre,

or

In my own shire if I was sad,

or that blithe song of youth at the dawn of the day—

When smoke blew up from Ludlow,

or Flecker's *Oak and Olive*, they still are redolent of the district, not of the country ; they still lack the depth and size of poems not of place but of *patria*, those songs of the Homeland wrung from the hearts, not the heads, of soldier-poets, by the terror, hardships, desolation of War. The same man may write both, but they are on different planes.

Lieutenant Geoffrey Howard, of the Royal Fusiliers, wrote of place, his own place, Devon, in *The Beechwood by the Road*, and *Without Shedding of Blood*, but he also wrote one poem with which these can hardly be compared, one, which to borrow Milton's words, his country surely "will not willingly let die," the Sonnet *To England* :—

Her seed is sown about the world. The seas
For her have pathed their waters. She is known
In swamps that steam about the burning zone,
And dreaded in the last white lands that freeze.
For her the glory that was Nineveh's
Is nought : the pomp of Tyre and Babylon
Nought : and for all the realms that Cæsar won—
One tithe of hers were more than all of these.
And she is very small and very green
And full of little lanes, all dense with flowers,
That wind along and lose themselves between
Mossed farms, and parks, and fields of quiet sheep.
And in the hamlets where her stalwarts sleep,
Low bells chime out from old, elm-hidden towers.¹

¹ *Soldier Poets*, p. 46.

As "Edward Melbourne," returned "after severe fighting at Loos," to rest behind the lines, his face turned westwards, he meets the life-giving coolness, and he greets it as

A leaping wind from England.¹

Sergeant Streets harps on the same racial note—

Thus at dawn do the watchers dream

Their faces turn to the starless west :

With a strange proud look on every face—

The scorn of Death, the pride of race.²

And, the supreme price paid, he writes the epitaph on the same strain—

He died for love of race ; because the blood
Of northern free men swelled his veins ;

He fell, but yielded not his English soul—
That lives out there beneath the battle's roll.³

Corporal Hill in the poem, *On Seeing the Coast of England from Boulogne*, sings of the country as a whole :—

A quiet wood, a quiet lane,
The song of birds amid the trees,
The splash of sun, the sting of rain,
The warm sweet air, the sighing breeze—⁴

a typically English but quite non-localised setting is here.

The love which dies for England breathes in Corporal Jarvis' *Dulce et decorum*—

If England calls this day—
Then shall I die that She
May live in Liberty—
That She may still be great
To rise above blind Hate
Of Foes—Her Flag unfurled
God's England to the world
For aye to be.

If England calls this day—
The rose-clad days of June
That fled by all too soon,
Shall be with me again
In Memory—and when
The daylight sudden closes
The perfume of June roses
Shall waft me hence.

¹ *Soldier Poets*, p. 62.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.

² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴ *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, p. 70.

If England calls this day—

. . . climbing through the breeze
Remembered melodies
Shall call me home.¹

A similar passion for England as the *patria*, quite distinct from any localised love of one's own birthplace, now distinguishes those who, for one reason or another, cannot be at the Front. We find it, for example in Theodore Maynard's *England*,² and again in his *Ballade of Orchards* :—

And from the drenched ground where the spent bullets spatter,
The blossoming Orchards of England remain !
L'Envoi.

Princes and Potentates, ye whom men flatter,
Hearken a moment to this my refrain—
Ye shall pass as a dream, and it will not much matter—
*The blossoming orchards of England remain !*³

On a finer note he apostrophises England's Dead—

Yet you shall rest awhile in English earth
And ripen many a pleasant English field
Through the green summer to the Autumn's mirth,
And flower unconsciously upon the weald—
Until that last angelic word be said,
And the shut graves deliver up their dead.⁴

Flecker, in those last days in Switzerland, debarred from all share in active life, gave infinite care to that last poem, wherein he swept the centuries together, and gathered into one our ancient race, as he uttered the great far hope :—

After all, think some,
Since we are men and shrine immortal souls,
Surely for us as for these nobly dead
The kings of England lifting up their swords
Shall gather at the gate of Paradise.⁵

Our whole race !—for the women of England are awake to the Vision—

. . . I knew that it must come.
For how should England live without your blood,—
Her son's, the best ? . . . I will not grudge her need,
For I am England's child and freely give.

¹ *Poetry Review*, Jan.-Feb., 1917, pp. 32 *et seq.*, republished *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, p. 75.

² *Ibid.*, March-April, 1918, p. 79.

³ *Drums of Defeat*, by Theodore Maynard, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵ *Collected Poems*, J. E. Flecker, p. 239.

There is not one shall say that I withheld
 Or stayed you by a word or look or tear ;
 I am too proud, for England's common blood
 Has sanctified my being as your own.
 My best I give. My best ? Why it's my all !

If I should grudge you, how could England live ?
 And so I gave you up to her who gave—
 I gave you up to England—England's son.¹

It would be the rankest ingratitude to forget or belittle Rudyard Kipling's appeals in the days of our materialistic negligence of most high calls : but, granting to them their highest moral and political value (using political in its primitive, not its party sense), we cannot fail to see that these poems quoted here are of another kind : these are the Poetry forged by the hour's need and pain, not verse of appeal to ward off, or stem the torrent of an only too probable future. Where Kipling wrote of the "far-flung" Empire, these breathe of *home* ; they have that racial pride bound up with love of the English—specifically *English*—soil, which inspired the lines which "age cannot wither," nor repetition ever stale—

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden, demi-Paradise,
 This fortress built by Nature for herself
 Against infection and the hand of war,
 This happy breed of men, this little world,
 This precious stone set in the silver sea.

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.²

We are too apt to forget the fact that the "Expansion of England," which began in Elizabeth's reign, culminated generations after in an Empire, wherein something of the old devotion to its heart's core was, if not irrecoverably lost at least temporarily eclipsed. Even in William Watson's glowing triumphant lines :—

slowly in the ambience of this crown
 Have many crowns been gathered, till, to-day,
 How many peoples crown thee, who shall say ?
 Time, and the ocean, and some fostering star,
 In high cabal have made us what we are,
 Who stretch one hand to Huron's bearded pines,

¹ Dorothy Grenside, *Poetry Review*, Sept.-Oct., 1917, p. 301.

² *Richard II*, ii., i., 41 *et seq.*

And one on Kashmir's snowy shoulder lay,
 And round the streaming of whose raiment shines
 The iris of the Australasian spray.
 For waters have connived at our designs,
 And winds have plotted with us—and behold,
 Kingdom in kingdom, sway in oversway,
 Dominion fold in fold :
 So wide of girth this little cirque of gold
 So great we are, and old.¹

As a man, tired and worn, turns from gorgeous dreams to the
 peace of a far-off home, so our poets, who fight for the Empire,
 turn to its heart of hearts—

She is very small and very green
 And full of little lanes, all dense with flowers.

In these Poems of the Great War, England herself, as the
 soul and centre of the *patria* comes to her own again. The
 great mass of the nation seemed, in days of peace, to have
 forgotten, as the French have never forgotten, *La Patrie*; to
 have grown deaf to their country's calls, blind to their own
 indissoluble obligations.

Some few, even now, seem too unaware of the obligation,
 which lies on all England's children, everywhere, to forget, at
 any rate for the time their personal grievances, their indi-
 vidual interests, their likes, their dislikes; to give up any-
 thing, everything for the security of the Homeland.

But the vast majority now remember once more that

There is no dearer land in all the world
 Than thee, my country, girded by the sea.²

Moreover, and surely this was inevitable, the stern facts of the
 last four years have brought back reality into our Poetry.
 The straining after effect, the pretty trifling, the decking out the
 most meagre thought in an elaborate tissue of words, the search
 after the exotic and the bizarre, not because, like Flecker, the
 writer has been in the East and knew what he was talking
 about, but because he had not been there and apparently
 desired a change from all the places and things and people to
 which he had grown over accustomed, the incessant posing,
 the centring of everything round the writer's self, the per-
 petual artificiality, all these things have, at last, disappeared.

¹ *Ode on the Coronation of King Edward VII.*, pp. 7 et seq.

² Captain John Mason, *More Songs by the Fighting Men*, p. 105.

A curious little poem called *Proof*, published last year, exemplifies this. It is the more interesting because, so it seems, it is not the work of a soldier, and shews therefore that this wholesomer, more natural mood has overtaken the civilian *literati* too—

We—we who mourned at death,
Who sobbed at parting breath,
Who wept when cripples pale,
With life of no avail,
Passed from us ; and had tears
For those of outworn years ;
And would keep sad and sick,
Unrestful 'mid the quick.—

Yea, *we* send forth our sons,—
Young, lusty, joyous ones,
Our manhood keen and fresh,
Unwearied, living, fresh,
Straight-limbed, with Life ahead,—
We *send* them to the Dead !

And this in Honour's name,
To save our souls from shame.
How prove more plainly here
It is not *Death* we fear ?
How prove more clearly we
Believe immortality ?¹

A casual reader might turn away shocked from the seeming brutality concerning the infirm and the old : but the depth of the sacrifice in the second verse must be weighed against the underlying, not the superficial meaning of the first ; and then, in the juster sense of values, the harshness disappears.

With this displacement of manufacture and futility by real life and feeling, comes, as is quite natural, a return of melody. Some have criticised these soldier songs as rough, and have excused them on the score of a real or supposed lack of writing materials in the trenches, as if the gift of Song were tied to one brand of pen or paper. The English once were a musical nation, they both loved and made it, though the ruthless destruction of musical scores at the Reformation somewhat obscured the fact of their old fertility in composition. Still through the ages their native genius for music has escaped in their poetry. Only of recent years have material ease, cultivated decadence and real poverty of imagination combined

¹ *Poetry Review*, Sept.-Oct., 1917, p. 302, H. M. Waithman.

to produce a state which would allow an Oxonian—who should at least value style—to print with serene tranquillity so halting a line as the second here—

I want to make myself
Lovelier on that last day than any of these
My lovers yet have found me ;¹

or perhaps, worse still, this foolish, rhythmless verse, with a rime as bad as the worst which Browning ever mischievously flung out—

I long to hear that tramp of the policeman's
Outside the shutters, but the night is dumb,
And in a state of tension unknown to Huysmans
I wait and wait for the sound that will not come.²

What had Huysmans to do with the matter ? and anyhow perverse mispronunciation of his name was needed to wrench it into anything like a rime with "policeman's." Such lack of music is rare now : "The sentinel graves of the *Poetry Review* young men who responded to the call in 1914 now consecrate the long line from Nieuport to Basra," wrote Mr. Galloway Kyle.³ There is another line too, wherein they have and will keep a place, the long line of English singers who have been men of action also : open these thin volumes where you will and you find such flute-like melody as—

Out by Arras in the night-time,
Star-shells in the starlit sky,
Showered like wild silver raindrops
From a fountain scattered high
Like the silver scales of fishes
In the tideway curving by,⁴

or such moaning music of wind and wave and human anguish as—

Come home !—come home !
The winds are at rest in the restful trees ;
At rest are the waves of the sundown seas ;
And home—they're home—
The wearied hearts and the broken lives—
At home ! at ease !⁵

As we turn these pages, we find ourselves freed at last from the trivial boredom of manufactured sentiment expressed in elaborately artificial phrases : once more we are among real

¹ *Oxford Poetry*, 1917, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³ *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, Preface, p. 8.

⁴ Private Petersen, *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, p. 125.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

things, things which matter, things of worth. All alike, soldiers and civilians share in this new realism, shot through as it is with the liveliest idealism. We must not, in any review of the harvest of the last four years, forget Mr. Mackereth's *Poems*; a single example of which may suffice to shew how far away he is from the laboured natural descriptions of the century's first decade :—

Wind from the Channel's reaching water,
Waft me the fragrance of English loam :
Sad I am with the scenes of slaughter,
Fond for the favouring hills of home.
Morn on the heath, and a curlew crying,
Over there 'twixt the moor and the sky ;
And an echo far through the wide waste hieing,
Haunts my heart with a lonely cry.
Land where the fields have friendly faces,
Love of my dreams in sun and rain,
Vernal voices in old sweet places
Call me home with a joy that's pain.¹

Then besides the War-poems already quoted, Mr. Theodore Maynard has written others which are not readily forgotten, e.g. *The Fool*, *A Reply* and the singularly distinctive *Song for Colours*.² Moreover, his latest volume, *Folly*, gives an instalment of still maturer Poetry, with high promise for the future. Whatever people may think of his work, it is real to him, as to those who share his secret ; it is not manufactured for the sake of manufacture. Beside this reality and melody, there is another change, shewing that the Georgian mood has passed, a deeper, more vital change. The crude horrors of the last few years, the crushing pain and sorrow, the shining heroism, the awful possibilities of life and death have banished the faithlessness which, so short a time ago, was, heaven save the mark !—fashionable. The sneering at religion and everything involved in it, which had become so appallingly common, is not often heard. The truths which Francis Thompson, R. L. Gales and Theodore Maynard proclaimed are beginning to dawn on the mass of men.

These soldiers at the " flaming ramparts " know what a man in his extremity needs—

I am dying, I am all alone,
I must have Thee—

¹ *The Red, Red Dawn*, James A. Mackereth, p. 104.

² *Drums of Defeat*, pp. 12, 14, 27.

so, in imperishable words, Frederic Myers once wrote. However irregularly, these Soldier Poets confess to some measure of Faith, confess to it without shamefacedness. Their outlook may be still obscure, cumbered with the Past—

Humbly, O England, we bring thee life in its folly stained youth
That which it may be, has striven, but ever has slackened and tired:
The faltering, often deceived, to combat now for the Truth
Dim-visions, to smite for the morrow unknown but desired.¹

Sometimes, as in Corporal Challenger's *Harvest*² there may be impatience with "light half-believers," a bitter wrath of revolt against the sins of respectable hypocrites, the tyranny of the strong; but there is no longer absolute indifference, no longer a shallow and polite contempt for religion. There may be ignorance, error, unorthodoxy, but there is not the blighting impiety with which England had been growing too familiar.

At the best this returning spirit of religion rises to a strain of thanksgiving not merely for material joys, which in such an era of pain might bulk above their intrinsic value, but for the greater things of life and death, for the gifts of intangible, imponderable worth—

Blessed be GOD above
For His sweet care,
Who heard the prayers of those whom most I love
And my poor supplianee there,
Who brought me forth in life and limb all whole,
Who blessed my powers with His Divine repair
And gave me back my soul.³

In that terse last line, this Border soldier has gathered up the vital truth concerning a great army, who have, like many a young Frenchman, their allies, come back from a long journey in a far and arid country.

Here, if anywhere, is the fundamental line of cleavage between them and the Georgians' mood, those Georgians whose general lack, at the best, of religious faith, and, at the worst, positive contempt for religion, accounted in no small measure for their meagreness, their poverty, their strange and vague indecision.

¹ Captain J. S. Masfield, *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, p. 100.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³ Captain J. E. Stewart, *More Songs of the Fighting Men*, p. 138.

It is a commonplace that co-temporaries cannot accurately and reliably appraise each other. Never is such appreciation harder than in moments like these of unparalleled chaos, disruption and loss. How can a just estimate be made of Verse, when time after time, and again and again, beneath the writer's name, the words appear, Killed in Action ?

Who can weigh in literary scales the heart's blood of those elected to fall in the very flower of their days ? Who would desire to be able to do it ?

The Future is veiled. If England stand at her last hour, then at any rate it will be said that her Soldier Poets restored to her, in the end of her days, her age-long courage, her blithe self-sacrifice, her high confidence, her gift of song. If, on the other hand, she stand now at the breaking of a new Dawn, then, like the Sky-lark of her homeland downs and meadows, they heralded in for her the rising Day.

VIII. Postscript: The Capacity of Vision

IN the hidden Future, besides the qualities of confidence, courage and self-sacrifice, another quality—always a pre-essential of these in their highest degree—will be acutely needed, the quality which we call Vision.

Where there is no Vision, the people perish,¹ so the "men of Hezekiah" recorded the Warning of Solomon. For perish, some read "cast off restraint." In either case, the warning applies with dreadful reality to the nations of the West, at this present hour.

Vision is of the essence of Mysticism, a thing so little understood by many because the word is so variously used. Traditionally, it may be defined as vision of and union with GOD in an atmosphere of love. Some Roman Catholic writers claim that there is and can be no real Mysticism outside their Communion; though no "definition" to that effect, I believe, exists.

In a recent book, *A Study in Illumination*, I ventured to suggest that the Poet's vision has affinity with the Saint's Illumination, is indeed the same in kind. It is perhaps as well to recall the fact that the classic writers on Mysticism, men like Rolle, Ruysbroeck, S. John of the Cross, differentiate clearly the three "stages" of the Mystical Life, naming them severally, purgation, illumination and union; great stress being laid on the first of these. The idea that poetic and saintly illumination might be the same in kind, however different in degree, was originally suggested to me as a subject for further consideration and elaboration by a striking passage in Baron von Hügel's great book, *The Mystical Element of Religion*. When he had brought together a widely varying company of great men, a collection including poets—among them Wordsworth and Browning—philosophers,

¹ *Book of the Proverbs.*

scientists, at least two generals and a politician of world-wide fame, he observed: "the procession, so largely made up of men and movements not usually reckoned as exclusively or directly religious, whose very greatness—one which humanity will not let die—is closely interwoven with Mystical and Metaphysical affirmations."¹

The juxtaposition of dissimilar characters was striking enough: but he closed his daring list with this bold affirmation: "Shear any of these men of their Mystical and Metaphysical elements, and you will have shorn Samson of his locks." I do not for a moment wish to claim that this passage was more than a stimulus to thought; I am not trying to shelter myself behind Baron von Hügel's distinguished name, but rather acknowledging a debt of a valuable suggestion. Many of those whom he mentioned would have made no claim to belong to the Latin Church, yet unhesitatingly he attributed to them Mystical tendencies. The whole question is of the limits, the boundaries of Mysticism. Is all direct, immediate knowledge mystical? The problem is no fancied one. *The Universe*, reviewing *A Study in Illumination*, observed: "At first, one is led to think of it" (illumination) "as belonging to a soul wrapped in contemplation of the hidden things of GOD; then, as it appears, it is merely the play of fancy, or peoples like the Irish."² What precisely is the meaning of "fancy" in this passage? It seems, on any reasonable definition, a poor, inadequate term for the many-sided function of Poetry. Remembering, in the opening pages of his star-strewn Essay on Shelley, Francis Thompson's impassioned appeal to the Church to call back the "help-mate" Poetry, one can only stand before this scoffing reference immeasurably confounded with surprise. Francis Thompson, profoundly religious, ingrainedly artistic, saw the service which poetry and religion can mutually render, as he also saw how the primal forces of the soul merge into, interact with one another. His genius was impatient of unnecessary sundering lines; and all the while his orthodoxy was impeccable: "The Church which was once the mother of

¹ *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Vol. ii., p. 271.

² *The Universe*, Feb. 5, 1915.

poets no less than of saints, during the last two centuries has relinquished to aliens the chief glories of poetry, if the chief glories of holiness she has preserved for her own. The palm and the laurel, Dominic and Dante, sanctity and song grew together in the soil. . . . Once poetry was as she should be, the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church ; the minister to the mind as the Church to the soul. But poetry sinned, poetry fell, and in place of lovingly reclaiming her, Catholicism cast her from the door to follow the feet of her pagan seducer. The separation has been ill for poetry ; it has not been well for religion."¹ The quaintly ungrammatical allusion to peoples like the Irish is hardly less unfortunate than this loose use of "fancy," for there are none. The Irish, whatever their faults (or virtues), are irrevocably themselves, with no similars or copies : and, as I have tried to indicate,² they have a rare gift of visionary insight which partakes of symbolism and mysticism, without being purely and entirely the one or the other.

In a more scholarly vein, *The Month*, the organ of the English Jesuit Fathers, launched its criticism : " the illumination of the saint is acknowledged in the Catholic Church to lie outside the law of ordinary human intelligence, being a gift of GOD, belonging to the supernatural order . . . the illumination of the poet (or the philosopher) is indeed natural, but is readily explicable as having entered through the senses in its original germs."³

It is an accepted canon of criticism that a writer's meaning, so far as it can be garnered, should be criticised, and not a signification which might justifiably be deduced, but was not intended by him. In this present passage, an opponent might urge that there is an implication that a saint is never a poet, and *vice versa*, but that is not the intentional meaning : or he might object to the rather bacteriological terminology, which would perhaps be frivolous. The reviewer apparently meant to draw a distinction, plainly and rigidly between the supernatural and the natural, or as one might better say, between the spiritual and the material. Even so, is the poet really to

¹ *Collected Works* of Francis Thompson, Vol. iii., pp. 1 *et seq.*

² Pp. 146 *et seq.*

³ *The Month*, Feb., 1915.

be relegated to and strictly confined within the material limitations of the senses, and to the use of discursive reason on the intimations of the senses? That is the real question; to put it more plainly and simply. Is it true or is it not true that poetic vision can be akin to religious, that the poet can share the intuition of the saint? The question leads on to that region of profound difficulty whereof it has been said, *omnia exeunt in mysterium*. The plea is not made at large, it is not argued that all poets are mystics. Yet the problem may be expressed in wider terms than those used above even; the potentiality of mysticism may, surely does exceed actual realisation; there may be mystics who fall short of the condition of both saint and poet. In an imperfect world, we must reckon with *degree*. The present writer has never entertained any desire, or urged any plea for the compromise of truth, and has no thought of doing so now. But outside that body of doctrine which the whole Church has authoritatively defined, and which the age-long practice of saints and sinners has effectively endorsed, there is, surely, a region wherein speculation may legitimately move, and where hypothesis, argument and possibility have their due and lawful place. Probably never, while the limits of Finity are upon us, and bind us, will any of us adequately appreciate how far we have as a race, obscured truth and hampered joy by our inveterate taste for drawing rigid lines, and forming mutually exclusive compartments where they do not exist and are not wanted.

I have already urged, in a previous chapter,¹ that it is, philosophically speaking, impossible to shut off theories of poetry irrevocably from one another. This arises from the fact that they issue from human capacities, moods, methods, which in their turn cannot be treated in this compartmental manner: the psychologist only at his peril treats the human ego as if it were a chemical compound.

Not only do the forces within an individual blend and merge so as to resist the merciless analytic division of the mental and spiritual vivisectionist, but the capacities of different individuals differ rather in degree than in kind, and the degree often depends on the use of them, varying according to the purpose

¹ Pp. 117, and 125 *et seq.*

to which they are directed, to the end which they are summoned to serve.

If distracted by the horrors of War, and by the legacy of chaos, disaster and broken purpose which inevitably ensues, the Western World needs one thing more than another, that thing is Vision, not imagination, but Vision ; not any sense of the importance of material things—human beings can be trusted never to lose that—but of the vital reality of all that which the senses can never apprehend. Men and women must learn once more the core of *la vraie vérité*, that *substance*, while it is real—is indeed the real reality in a panorama of shadows—is non-material. *Where there is no vision, the people perish!* That dire end is perhaps a visible possibility to some among us.

Vision, in the spiritual sense, pierces through the material surface to the veiled reality. Universals are dangerous weapons to handle ; but perhaps in Europe's dark hour it is not temerarious to plead that vision, intuitive conviction have, never in the history of the world, been more acutely necessary than now. That urgent necessity renders the plea entered here that mystical vision can be found outside the pale of the Roman Catholic communion of more than what might be called academic or sectarian interest. It is indeed inconceivable that its Authorities would ever definitely endorse that claim.

One qualification must be made, the one on which the great classical Mystics have always dwelt, viz. that Purgation precedes Illumination, that purity is the essential prelude to vision. With that proviso, surely when all is said and done, it is not heretical to claim that it is more than a poet's "fancy" that there is a place

where mortal and immortal merge
And human dies divine ;

not heretical to ascribe the possibility of illumination, not only to poet as well as to saint, but also to every man, to any man, who will "wash him and make him clean," and yield himself up. Otherwise, what did S. John mean by *Erat lux vera, quæ illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc*

mundum?¹ Is it not true that, as holiness is the potential state of every man, of any man—*Si quis vult, post me venire, abneget semitipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me*,² so is illumination, if we are to believe S. John, the *potential heritage of every, of any man*? The whole doctrine of purgation and illumination is folded up in his words quoted above, and in his record of our LORD's words to Nicodemus : *Hoc est autem judicium : quia lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras quam lucem : erant enim eorum mala opera*.³

It is exactly loss of this spiritual, "super-sensible" light, nothing more nor less, but just this "vision," a loss consequent upon his wilful addiction to his "own bad works" which Henry Vaughan, that white visionary soul moving through the storm-tossed, confused seventeenth century, laments again and again :—

When on some gilded Cloud or Flow'r
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of Eternity ;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A sev'ral sin to every sense,
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness,
O how I long to travel back
And tread again that ancient track.⁴

That he connected purity and vision is proved by the energy of conviction and passionateness of entreaty with which he seeks the one and only remedy for the darkness, the confusion of apprehension into which deliberate wrong-doing had plunged him :—

Come and relieve
And tame and keep down with Thy light
Dust that would rise and dim my sight !
Lest left alone too long
Amidst the noise and throng,
Oppressèd I,
Striving to save the whole, by parcels die.⁵

But whatever the potentiality of "Everyman" may be, it

¹ S. John i. 9.

² S. Luke ix. 23.

³ S. John iii. 19.

⁴ *The Retreat*.

⁵ *Distraction*.

will suffice, for our present theme, to narrow the issue to the Poets. So great and overwhelming is the Time that it will be no small augury of hope if we can look to the poets for some

bright illumination . . .
which dominates the night.

In good sooth then, are we really asked to believe henceforth that poets, as they look out upon Nature, upon all this goodly Universe, cannot, if their personal fault have not dimmed the inner sight, be looking on the surface at the manifestly material, but beneath the surface at the hidden reality, divinely created? If they cannot, who then *made* the world? If one fact about Philosophy be certain, it is that the great Doctors of the Church—whom no Catholic can throw over—were realists, not idealists. They regarded the universe as a real organism, an objective thing; and man, though in and part of it, they regarded as a subject cognitive of the world as object. Further, in that objective world, man might discern the "hidden things of GOD," as is evident from this which S. Augustine wrote: "To Thee, there is nothing at all evil; and not only to Thee, but also to Thy creation as a whole, because there is nothing without, which may break in, and corrupt that order, which Thou has appointed to it. . . . Far be it then that I should say, 'These things should not be,' for should I see nought but these, I should indeed long for the better; but still must, even for these alone, praise Thee; for these do show that 'Thou art to be praised, from the earth, dragons, and all deeps, fire, hail, snow, ice and stormy wind, which fulfil Thy word; mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars; beasts and all cattle, creeping things and feathered fowls; kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth; young men and maidens, old men and children, praise Thy Name.' But when, from Heaven, these 'praise Thee, praise Thee, our GOD, in the heights, all Thy angels, all Thy Hosts, sun and moon, all the stars and light, the Heaven of heavens, and the waters that be above the heavens, praise Thy Name'; I did not now long for things better, because I conceived of all; and with a sounder judgment I apprehended that the things

above were better than these below, but all together better than those above alone."¹

The fine comprehension of the closing words is of the nature of a rebuke to the proposed limitation of mysticism to the saints—"I apprehended that the things above were better than these below, but all together better than those above alone." In the great theory of S. Augustine not only have the "things of sense" their place, but those of "super-sense" lose if the former be wholly absent. Surely, it is a strange and poor idea that it is not "Catholic" to admit that the poet and the saint can worship at the same shrine and bathe in the one glorious Light. To shut Poetry off entirely from Religion, to regard it as "merely the play of fancy," whatever that may mean (and one is sometimes tempted to think that it means very little) is perilously near the Manichæan heresy, which placed "sin" in things, rather than in the *use* of them. Here again appeal may be made to S. Augustine—"I inquired what iniquity was, and found it to be no substance, but the perversion of the will, turned aside from Thee, O GOD, the Supreme Substance, towards the lowest things."²

If really, we may not regard the Poet as capable of illumination of vision, then it is to be feared that Dante will have to go overboard with the Doctors of the Church:—

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorrideva,
Perch'io guardassi in suso; ma io era
Già per me stesso tal qual ei voleva;

Chè la mia vista, venendo sincera,
E più e più, entrava per lo raggio
Dell'alta luce, che da sè è vera.³

The stanzas which follow show as clearly as human words can that Dante's vision was, at last, real mystic vision; that the half lights of "the way" had finally been lost in the splendour of the Goal:—

¹ *Confessions*, vii., 13.

² *Ibid.*, vii., 16.

³ Bernard gave me the sign and smiled to me that I should look on high, but I already of myself was such as he would have me; Because my sight, becoming purged, now more and more was entering through the ray of the deep light which in itself was true. *Paradiso*, xxxiii., 49.

Qual è colui che sonnando vede,
 È dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
 Rimane, e l'altro alla mente non riede,

Cotal son io, chè quasi tutta cessa
 Mi visione, ed ancor mi distilla
 Nel cuor lo dolce che nacque da essa.¹

That Dante's was true mystic vision is plain, for, as the bodily sight fails, then that which is born in the mystical atmosphere of Love waxes and remains—"mi distilla *nel cuor lo dolce*." No one can pretend that Dante was a saint rather than a poet. If any one will argue that he had long to wait and far to go or ever he beheld the vision of GOD, that has been the lot of common men and women, of sinners and saints, of the latter, quite certainly, as one of the greatest among them, S. Teresa, frequently avers. No one endowed with natural sense and furnished with knowledge of life's plain facts will dream of claiming that apprehension of the noumenal beneath the phenomenal, such as is shewn, to quote Baron von Hügel by "a Browning or a Wordsworth" is identical with the high ecstasy of vision of a Walter Hilton, a Ruysbroeck, a S. Teresa, a S. John of the Cross, or even of a Pascal's transitory glimpse—

L'an de grace 1654
 Lundy 23^e nov^{bre} jour de St. Clement

Depuis environ dix heures et demi du soir
 Jusques environ minuit et demi
 FEU

Joye, joye, joye, et pleurs de joye—²

but only that all vision of the super-sensible must be homogeneous in kind, however tremendously it may differ in degree and persistency. To shut out all but a few from mystical capacity is surely to invite the great majority of human beings to acquiesce in a deadly dulness of apprehension, just as the popular conviction that genuine "goodness" is meant

¹ As is he who dreaming seeth, and when the dream is gone, the passion stamped remaineth, and nought else cometh to the mind again;

Even such am I; for almost wholly faileth me my vision, yet doth the sweetness that was born of it still drop within my heart.

Paradiso, xxxiii., 58.

² L'Amulette mystique de Pascal.

for and possible only to a few predestined saints fringed round with odd people with "a taste for going to Church," has produced a vast multitude who close their eyes entirely to the joys and possibilities of the extra-material world. Whatever else Catholicism means or does not mean, it assuredly teaches that all men, all things, are potentially one in GOD : like Plato's philosopher, it "sees all things together." No doubt the mystical state admits of an infinity of degrees ; the great saint may stand, at last, on the topmost rung of attainment, while, since there really is a

ladder

Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross,

far below perhaps, yet on the same ascent are his little brothers and sisters, poets, common men and women, whom you will. Since GOD is One, truth must be One. Let opinion waver as it may, play tricks and change, any apprehension of GOD or of truth must be the same in kind whatever its degree, as all apprehension thereof. To write and talk otherwise is surely either to deny the nature of GOD, or to make nonsense of human knowledge of Him—

poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth
Have each his own peculiar faculty,
Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
Objects unseen before.¹

Here, Wordsworth was not referring to any one of the "five senses."

All who are familiar with the writings of the great saints who were mystics too, will know of their image of the "divine spark" at the apex of the human soul ; that spark which, on a sudden, fuses into flame and ascends to and merges in the Fire of GOD. Boehme called it the "spark of the love of God, or the divine light manifested in the soul" ; and in words curiously akin Browning claimed that here is the source of "real knowledge" :—

Truth is within ourselves ; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness ; and around

¹ *The Prelude*, xiii., 301.

Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,

and, to KNOW

Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.¹

He put these well-known words into the mouth of Paracelsus in those early stages of his career, which he afterwards described to Aprile as the days when

I . . . sought to KNOW as thou to LOVE.

It is not without significance that his dying words as he "attains" are

Aprile ! Hand in hand with you, Aprile !

Lest any one should fancy that mystical vision is some primrose path of the dilettante, Boehme, in a striking passage, tells how "Satan the accuser," whispered to the soul, "This happy change in thy spirit is not from GOD, but only from thine own imagination," and how, further increasing the soul's perplexity, "the divine light retired in the soul and shone but in the inward ground, as fire raked up in embers," and how, even so, the soul "could not leave off struggling ; for the burning fire of love was sown in it."²

Those who "see things together" will not be surprised when this seventeenth-century German cobbler's words are echoed by the great poet of the Nineties :—

I yet have sight beyond the smoke,
And kiss the gods' feet, though they wreak
Upon me stroke and again stroke ;
And this my seeing is not weak.³

It is perhaps desirable to attempt a closer accuracy, that of the philosopher, rather than of the saint and poet, concerning this mysterious matter of illumination or vision. We all agree that those of us who are not deficient or abnormal have "sense-knowledge" : if we put our finger in a flame it is scorched and we know it ; if we eat sugar we have a definite sensation of taste, distinguishable from other tastes, say of bi-carbonate of soda, or of pepper ; and we believe that all

¹ *Paracelsus : Works of Browning*, Vol. i., p. 71.

² *The Way from Darkness to True Illumination*, Jacob Boehme.

³ *The Night of Forebeing*, Francis Thompson, *New Poems*, p. 55.

other normal people resemble us in this. Moreover, we all agree that those of us in possession of ordinary human ability and intelligence can arrive at knowledge which issues from reason applied to experience. And there the many call a halt. But the visionary, the seer, goes further: he claims over and above all this "mediate" knowledge, to *know*, to *see* "immediately," without any intervention of the "discursive" or the "sensible." He does not argue or believe, he sees, he knows.¹ Père Poulain, an orthodox theologian, a philosopher, may perhaps be accepted as a guide here. He puts the core of the problem with plain brevity: *Les mystiques catholiques affirment avoir des perceptions et communications purement intellectuelles. . . . Or une question a été souvent discutée de notre temps : quelle valeur a cette croyance des mystiques ? N'est-ce pas une simple illusion de leur part ?*² A similar attitude may be found in the frequent sceptic who invites us to waste no time on the meanderings of "those mad fellows the Poets." To answer this question, Père Poulain divides the inquiry into two others, since our old friend "the fallacy of many questions," still operates among us: *how* can the mystics be sure of the *objective reality* of these perceptions which they claim to have? and then, *how* can they enable us to share their certitude? The first question he answers by an illustration. The mystic, he says in effect, is as certain of his vision as I am of the reality of the book lying before me. With delightful wit, he observes: *On aurait beau m'expliquer par de savants raisonnements que je prends pour objectif un phénomène qui n'est que subjectif : on n'arrivera pas à me convaincre.*³ Here we get the intrinsic nature of mystical vision, a direct perception so vivid, so certain to him who perceives, as *real* as objective perception of a *material* thing is, though their respective planes differ, that nothing, no argumentation or reflection of any kind can alter it, whether by addition or diminution. Now is this state of "immediate perception" the monopoly of the saint; or, can others, poets among them, share it? Perhaps a half-way house of under-

¹ Cp. quotation from *Sanctity and Song*, p. 83.

² *Des Graces d'Oraison*, xxxi., § 46.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

standing, between Père Poulain's obvious "book" and the mystic's

tidings from the vast,

may be found in a claim, expressed by Montaigne in an imperishable phrase, a claim to which every human soul responds, in a flash of instant and grateful acquiescence, because it says what each of us knows, and yet had not known how to say. Montaigne was asked to explain the ground of his affection for his supreme friend, Etienne de Boétie; and he replied: *Parce que c'estoit luy; parce que c'estoit moy*. Here, in a region known to every one of us, we have a taste of immediacy. Yet, to forestall criticism, let us remember that as not every saint is a mystic, nor even every mystic a canonised saint, so we must not dream of suggesting that every poet is a mystic. Perhaps no one is a mystic all the time. As we try to understand, let us recall S. Teresa's words, where the nature of Vision is admitted to be indescribable, while its reality is declared: "At last, it happened to me, and still at times it happens to me, that our Lord shews me greater secrets, but in such wise that I only see just what He means me to see, without its being in the power of my soul, when it wishes to do so, to see anything beyond. The least of these secrets is ample to flood the soul with wonder, and to increase in it contempt and a poor opinion of mundane things. I wish I could give some idea of even the lesser things thus shewn to me; but when I try, I find it absolutely impossible: because between that unique light of the Divine visitation wherein all is light, and the everyday light of the world, there is such a vast difference that one cannot compare them; the sunlight seems mere ugliness."¹ It would not be very easy to quote a passage more illustrative of Père Poulain's description of the irrevocable conviction, the unshakableness of the Mystics' claim. But how does it differ *in kind* from Vaughan's so simple yet so tremendous declaration?—

I am so warm'd now by this glance on me
That midst all storms I feel a ray from Thee,²

¹ *Autobiography* of S. Teresa, chap. xxxviii.

² *The Mount of Olives*.

or from Thompson's far more elaborated, more gorgeous, more poignant but not more convinced lines?—

Where is the land of Luthany,
Where is the tract of Elenore?
I am bound therefor.

'Pierce thy heart to find the key;
With thee take
Only what none else would keep;
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,
Learn to wake when thou dost sleep.

When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
When their sight to thee is sightless;
Their living, death; their light, most lightless;
Search no more—
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.'

'When to the new eyes of thee
All things by immortal power,
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linkèd are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star;

O seek no more!
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.¹

Will any one say what is the actual difference in kind? Is there any? Further, Francis Thompson suggests the second of the problems into which Père Poulain broke up the main one—how can the mystics bring us to share their certitude?—for he writes of certitude, as if remembering Newman's warning that certitude is a quality of the mind, certainty a property of propositions. Père Poulain answers that they can only succeed where there is already a readiness to believe in the supernatural, or where, at any rate, there is no prejudice against it. He admits, or rather proclaims, that believers and atheists are alike incapable of refuting each other. They are, in fact, operating on different planes.

One suggestion he makes is worth further consideration. If, as he says, it be true, and it surely is, that "our intuition is incommunicable,"² yet the affirmations of those who claim

¹ *The Mistress of Vision.*

² *Des Graces d'Oraison*, p. 614.

to possess it outweigh the mere negations of the unaware ; in other words, concurrent positive evidence is more weighty, more nigh to proof, being akin to the Newmanian " accumulation of probabilities," than any negative statements. We must not drive this argument further than it will hold, but rather analyse it. There are, indubitably, cases in which an affirmation is worth more as evidence than a negative statement : e.g. if I say that I saw an early violet in the hedgerow, it is more likely to be true than my companion's denial that there was even one, since violets are secretive, and many mortals unobservant. But this is not so always. Suppose the problem to be the presence or absence of a circus elephant in a Sussex lane. It is equally incredible that I should suppose it was there if it were not, and that some one else should think it was not, when it was, since elephants are large and Sussex lanes narrow. The conclusion of which is that probability is apt to vary with the nature of the case. But, in the matter of Mysticism is not the likelihood of truth on the affirmative side ? It seems so improbable that such wonders should be the delusion of so many people, and these often so dissimilar in character and circumstance : for, after all, there is remarkable " consent " among those who affirm these facts.

The extremely happy phrase which Père Poulain uses to describe Mystic Vision, *l'état éveillé*, opens up a further suggestion, viz. that we can see why the affirmer is more likely to be right than the denier ; awakening from sleep being a condition with which we all are familiar. Those who deny the possibility of mystic vision are not inaptly compared to men alive indeed, endowed not improbably with many excellent faculties, but, for the time being, plunged in sleep. Such a suggestion is not offered as proof ; but it may be an aid to apprehension.

The Bollandist Fathers have defined very precisely the exact degree of authority attaching to the mystics' statements concerning vision. Père Toulemont, writing on the subject of *les Révélations privées*, said : *Elles ont la valeur du témoignage de la personne qui les rapporte, ni plus ni moins.*¹

Benedict XIV laid down that such revelations should be

¹ *Les Etudes*, 1866, p. 61.

received not "with catholic faith, but only with *human faith*, conformably with the rules of prudence"; and Cardinal Pitra remarked that "when the Church approves them, they are only received as probable, not as indubitable. They must not be used to settle historical, physical, philosophical questions, which are matters of controversy among the learned."¹ A gift which needs thus to be so carefully hedged round is surely not beyond a Poet's reach?

Yet it is not denied that a distinction of degree may often exist between saintly and poetic vision. The poet, no doubt, is often more faintly illumined; he is dealing with something less definite; an *intuition*, as the saint's is, but if one may so put it, an intuition less sharply outlined, and, not seldom, less intimately felt. A. E.'s beautiful, yet elusive lines

God like a wind goes breathing
A dream of Himself in all

may serve as an excellent instance.

When, in his twenty-first chapter, Père Poulain deals with the elements of error which may lurk in revelation (i.e. in vision), it is impossible to help feeling that here, some at least of the poets have been closely conversant with the matters of which he treats. He suggests five possible sources of such error, from one of which indubitably poets may suffer, viz. inaccuracy of interpretation. The failure springs from the recipient's misapprehension, or if it do not go so far as that, yet through some deficiency the revelation is dimmed, the vision is seen only in half light as it were.

In *The Mistress of Vision*, Francis Thompson rings the changes on this particular thought:—

(i.) Secret was the garden
 Set i' the pathless awe
 Where no star its breath can draw.

(vii.) The sun which lit that garden wholly,
 Low and vibrant visible,
 Tempered glory woke;

(viii.) And her eyes a little tremble, in the wind of her own sighs.

¹ Quoted by Père Poulain: *op. cit.*, pp. 334, 335.

(ix.)

Many changes rise on
 Their phantasmal mysteries.
 They grow to an horizon
 Where earth and heaven meet ;
 And like a wing that dies on
 The vague twilight-verges,
 Many a sinking dream doth fleet
 Lessening down their secrecies.
 And as dusk with day converges,
 Their orbs are troublously
 Over-gloomed and over-glowed with hope and
 fear of things to be.

In no very different vein, S. John of the Cross, in the case of the saints' Visions, emphasises their defective apprehension of divine mysteries : " In the first place it is clear that the prophecies do not always mean what we understand by them, and that the issues do not correspond with our expectations. The reason is that GOD is infinite and most high, and therefore His prophecies, locutions and revelations involve other conceptions, other meanings, widely different from those according to which we measure our own perceptions ; and they are the more true and the more certain the less they seem so to our understanding."¹

He goes on to teach that our misunderstanding is not only failure to grasp the whole, not only that we grasp a part while the rest is escaping us, we taking a bit to be the whole, but that the nature of the wonder shewn is beyond us : " As I have said, the chief purpose of GOD in sending visions is to express and communicate the spirit which is hidden within them, and which is very hard to be understood."²

So we are to realise that the method of the Divine Teacher is, as, if we know anything of the business of teaching, we should expect, to keep the lesson always a little ahead of the learner, not within his easy effortless reach, lest his endeavours first and then his abilities grow slack and soft ; a little ahead, yet not so far beyond him as to overwhelm his heart and will with difficulty. It is to be, in Browning's phrase

A dim splendour ever on before,

and what is this really but the same conviction which is the burden of Henry Vaughan's ?—

¹ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, xix., 2.

² *Ibid.*, § 6.

There is in GOD—some say—
 A deep but dazzling darkness ; as men here
 Say it is late and dusky, because they
 See not all clear.
 O for that Night ! where I in Him
 Might live invisible and dim.

Though no proof exists that they were, these lines might have been built directly on this phrase of S. John of the Cross : " it is true, speaking after the manner of men, that GOD is as dark a light to the soul as faith."¹ It is difficult indeed to escape from the conviction that poem and prose-treatise are the entirely independent testimony of two surrendered, pure, divinely-illuminated souls, one a saint, the other a poet, who both alike, experienced the deep mystery of Divine Dark-Light. Again, who can really believe that Vaughan referred solely and only to an artificially named moment in the twenty-four hours, and not at all to the deeper mystery of divine illumination in obscurity, when he wrote, in the same poem ?—

Wise Nicodemus saw such light
 As made him know his God by night.

In less illumined souls, this " light " may be even fainter, more obscured, and yet there it is, the same real, other-world light. Among the Irish poets, specially, we shall not look in vain for this mist-dimmed gleaming. Is there nothing of it, if with obscurity yet still with intensely real revelation, in Joseph Campbell's

Heard like some ancient Gaelic strain
 Ocean's ancient voice in pain ;
 Darkness folding hill and wood,
 Sorrow drinking at my blood,
 Wounds of Eloim
 Weep on me.

That prayer could only be wrung from one whose eyes had *seen*, if dimly ; whose ears had *heard*, even though from an incalculably far horizon.

A qualification may well be admitted. Where the saint by deliberate self-purgation, long sustained and often renewed, may, as one might say, have cleared the way, and so have attained to a more vivid, more complete and intense vision,

¹ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, 11.

the poet may quite easily, through his own fault, not improbably through his own great fault, a fault halving, perhaps almost destroying, effort have left the path all encumbered, overgrown, obstructed. Thus where the saint's vision is a rushing flood of light, the poet's may be but a filtering through those thorns and briars which he has never cut away.

Henry Vaughan knew this ; declared it often, seldom more categorically than in *The Relapse*—

I have deserved a thick Egyptian damp,
—Dark as my deeds—
Should mist within me and put out that lamp
The Spirit feeds.

Surely such illumination as that is not "readily explicable as having entered through the senses in its original germs"? Henry Vaughan is not the only poet who thus wrote, nor the seventeenth the only century which could produce such a poet. The twentieth, in the very flush of its extreme youth, heard another poet harp on the self-same string:—

Crois : Vie ou Mort, que t'importe,
En l'éblouissement d'amour ?
Prie en ton âme forte :
Que t'importe nuit et jour ?
Car tu sauras des rêves vastes
Si tu sais l'unique loi :
Il n'est pas de nuit sous les astres,
Et toute l'ombre est en toi.

Aime : Honte ou Gloire, qu'importe
A toi, dont voici le tour ?
Chante de ta voix qui porte
Le message de tout amour ?
Car tu diras le chant des fastes
Si tu dis ton intime emoi :
Il n'est pas de fatals désastres,
*Toute la défaite est en toi.*¹

Vaughan goes further and seems to admit the persistent existence of some hampering, hiding obstruction :

Only the veil which Thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veil I say is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows Thee from me.
This veil Thy full-eyed love denies
And only gleams and fractions spies.

¹ *Poèmes et Poésies*, Francis Vielé-Griffin, p. 305.

O take it off ! make no delay
 And brush me with Thy light—that I
 May shine unto a perfect day,
 And warm me at Thy glorious eye !
 O take it off ! or till it flee,
 Though with no lily, stay with me.

Yet an obstacle does not destroy, necessarily, what it impedes : but it does prove its existence ; an obstacle must have something to obstruct, which is the whole point.

A recent Editor of Vaughan, writing of an earlier verse in this poem, remarks that it “redeems from mere quaintness such a poem for instance as ‘Cock-crowing.’”¹

It is easy enough to meet people who are only bewildered by the mystical standpoint. But to call this inspired petition—bathed and suffused in the shimmering gleam of some unearthly dawn at the hour of the earthly cock-crowing, the prayer—

Brush me with Thy light

“quaintness” seems an extravagance of impenetrability.

In the face of such Poetry, it is hard to believe that the Catholic Church will ever authoritatively draw a hard and fast line round the “Light that lighteth every man,” i.e. round its potentiality ; that it will ever draw one concerning that Light’s actual shining, whether on canonised saint, or poet, or mere ordinary striving mortal.

There is a suggestive significance in the fact that the War, in all its crude horror, was due to Germany, which for many decades had given her most powerful energies to the development of scientific achievement—not to imaginative science, but to those branches which perfected material instruments—and to the devastation of the extreme “Higher Criticism” ; and, that while no one will ever forget Belgium’s heroic stand, nor the self-sacrificing valour of Russia’s early efforts, yet pre-eminently it was England, supposedly “decadent” and very obviously devoted to material ease, and France with her record of avowed unbelief, who were the backbone of that desperate defence on which the future of European civilisation hung so precariously and for so long. It was the

¹ Introduction to Henry Vaughan’s Poems in *The Muses’ Library*.

England, who with all her opulence and self-indulgence had nourished those who kept up a steady stream of poetry ; it was the France who underneath her flaunted profanity had kept alive an ardent faith, a visionary philosophy, a genuine poetic activity. Seldom perhaps has the element of illumination in human life won a more complete victory over mundane mechanics, and that against more tremendous odds. No one can pretend that the issues were clear-cut, or plainly visible to the great masses of the peoples, but the intensity of the Allied effort was obviously due to something real though not at first manifest. What was it but the conviction that however hidden, the Light still shone steadily behind the storm-cloud ; that their blind battling would, must, eventually breakthrough the mirk and dust, the din and smother, and restore to them that which they could not express in words, but which made the difference between mere gross existence and the life of human men and women ? The outburst of Poetry which accompanied and relieved the misery of war was in itself testimony to the Light behind, sufficient proof that neither France nor England fought for *joie de bataille*, but for some far-off, deadly endangered *joie de vivre*.

As the strife dies down, and the nations turn, one by one, to their task of recuperation, what of England ?

A voice, from the heart of the battle-days, steals upon our ear—

She is very small and very green
And full of little lanes, all dense with flowers,
That wind along and lose themselves between
Mossed farms, and parks, and fields of quiet sheep.
And in the hamlets where her stalwarts sleep,
Low bells chime out from old, elm-hidden towers.

With what are these appealing lines instinct ? Surely with that capacity of vision, that detection of the real beneath the apparent, which even in " the nation of shopkeepers " has ever found a place in the hearts of her saints, her poets, her men of goodwill.

Then beyond our own England, there is the Patria of the whole race. In these days of overthrow, desolation and confusion, unparalleled perhaps, in recorded times, save by the destruction and chaos of the sixth and immediately

succeeding centuries, what of Humanity's Common Patria? Material reconstruction there must, of course, be; but it will come to nothing but doom and misery, unless with it, and stretching far beyond it come æsthetic, moral, spiritual regeneration. In a poem not published till his works were collected, and then included among those gathered together under the general title of *Poems of Sight and Insight*, Thompson sang again of the Days of Creation, the *Carmen Genesis*, the Song of Beginnings. Two stanzas, inspired by that daring eagle vision which made his Poetry a thing standing apart from and over against the sea of materialism, into which with magnificent squandering courage he flung it, may serve not only as the tale of Man's Creation, but as a great and golden key to his re-Creation:—

And, last, Man's self, the little world
Where was Creation's semblance furled,
Rose at the linking nod :
For the first world, the moon and sun
Swung orb'd. That human second one
Was dark, and waited God.

His locks He spread upon the breeze,
His feet He lifted on the seas,
Into His worlds He came :
Man made confession : " There is Light ! "
And named, while Nature to its height
Quailed, the enormous Name.¹

¹ *Collected Works* of Francis Thompson, Vol. ii., p. 58.

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